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NOVEMBER
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 65

November 1992

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Interface

David Pringle

Now that Dave Langford's "Ansi-ble Link" news column has established itself in this magazine (see page 22) there seems to be less and less for me to report in the editorials. But there must be a good deal of news which is not reaching us – or, at any rate, not reaching us in good time. Authors, agents, publishers: please remember that we are interested in all aspects of the sf scene: we'd be grateful if you'd keep us informed of upcoming books, etc., as much in advance as possible.

One press release which we did receive recently was from editor Richard Evans at Victor Gollancz Ltd. It tells us that our frequent contributor Ian Watson has a major new work forthcoming in 1993: "Mono is to be published in two volumes, *Lucky's Harvest* and *Ukko's Homecoming*. Inspired by the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, Mono is a novel on a grand scale, untinged hard sf with high fantasy ... Gollancz will publish the first book in the summer of 1993 as a lead title. The deal is worth £40,000 to Watson, and Gollancz are confident that Mono will be his most successful novel to date." (It's unusual for British publishers to name sums of money in this fashion, though it's commonplace in American publishing.)

Video SF

Another press release comes from someone we haven't heard of before, Sam Keogh of **New Flame Productions**, but he has an interesting project to announce:

"As professionals from the world of TV, we are exasperated by the lack of good science fiction on television, and, for that matter, on film. The reasons are fairly clear: it's expensive to make, and not as popular as Coronation Street. We propose to make science fiction for consumption on video only, using two ideas to reduce costs to a minimum.

"The first is to assemble a team of enthusiasts much as you would a rock band. So we hope to find background artists, performers, music makers, designers, etc, who are willing to work speculatively against a profit-share if the project succeeds (as we, director, video-editor and producer, are).

"The second is to limit ourselves to a range of production techniques which are easy, cheap and effective – and make a virtue of them. Our dream is to make a sell-through video which looks like a collision between a graphic novel, a rock video, *Hill Street Blues* and *Blode Runner*.

"We need a good, intelligent science-fiction story that has not yet been published, and we invite prospective writers to send us a one-page synopsis and a short sample of script (say, two sides of A4). Do any writers out there want to join our band? We'd also like to hear from folk who would be interested in becoming involved in other roles. Write to Sam Keogh, New Flame Productions, Suite 401, 302 Regent Street, London W1R 5AL."

Horror Awards

The 1992 Bram Stoker Awards for best horror fiction, decided on by the membership of the Horror Writers of America, are as follows:

Novel: *Boy's Life* by **Robert R. McCammon**

First novel: *The Cipher* by **Kathe Koja** and *Prodigol* by **Melanie Tem** (tie)

Novellette: "The Beautiful Uncut Hair of Graves" by **David Morrell**

Short story: "Lady Madonna" by **Nancy Holder**

Collection: *Prayers to Broken Stones* by **Dan Simmons**

Non-fiction: *Clive Barker's Shadows in Eden* by **Stephen Jones**
Life achievement: **Gahan Wilson** (cartoonist)

Yet Another Award?

In the July/August issue of *Science Fiction Chronicle* Don D'Amassa came up with an amusing notion – the "H. G. Awards (1921-1956)," i.e. retrospective awards for the best sf novels, for those years before the annual Hugo Award became established. It's just a game, of course, but in my view there are some problems with his choices...

For example, his "winner" as best sf novel of 1930 is *The Block Star Poses* by John W. Campbell. Hasn't he considered, or is he deliberately ignoring, a rather influential item called *Lost and First Men* by Olaf Stapledon? Likewise, for 1932 he nominates *When Worlds Collide* by Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer – but what about *Brove New World* by Aldous Huxley? Perhaps it's a question of national bias.

And why commence these awards in 1921? You could start at the beginning of the century, with, say, *The First Men in the Moon* by H.G. Wells as the winner for 1901. (However, science-fiction novels were not thick enough on the ground in those days for there to have been a winner every year.) Anyone care to play the game? Send us your lists of yesteryear's "H. G." winners.

(David Pringle)

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Interaction

Dear Editors:

I feel I must write to express my distaste at Chris Gilmore's article "Why is Science Fiction?" in IZ 62. It is a strangely unfocused piece that never gets round to explaining its slightly odd title, and rambles from one side-track to another before apparently giving up in despair. At one point, critical objectivity is given the afternoon off and Gilmore indulges in some petty mud-slinging, which devalues any serious point he might have wanted to make. I have no doubt that an interesting piece could be written examining the place of sf in literature in the light of Greene's novels/entertainments dichotomy, but this was not it.

SF's isolation in the ghetto can only partly be attributed to mainstream snobbery. It is true that as long as critics (and many writers) hold to the view that the subject matter of a given text is irrelevant, those books which deal primarily in ideas will always be dismissed as second-rate. Add to this the literary establishment's reluctance to consider anything which smacks of science and technology ("... in real life there is no such thing as algebra...") and you have the ingredients for the ingrained prejudice we have all witnessed over the years.

However, a simple answer like that usually misses something out. It would be dishonest to blame only the literary mainstream for our ghetto mentality. So much sf (as Sturgeon noted) is crap. There are armies of writers who are happy to turn out intellectual chewing-gum, just as there are armies of readers ready to consume the product. (This is not unique to sf of course. Production-line romances and glossy sex-and-shopping sagas are a well-established phenomenon. In both cases the cover art is usually a dead giveaway.) By sheer weight of numbers, if the external impression of the genre derives from such dross, what hope is there for the serious writer?

Turning to Gilmore's attempted trashing of Kurt Vonnegut, I have to declare an interest here. I am biased in Vonnegut's favour. Having read all his novels and most of his short fiction, in the main I would say that I enjoyed them. True, some work better than others, but they all contain serious points, even if those ideas are expressed in a non-serious way. When I read Gilmore's article I had just finished reading *Hocus Pocus*. Perhaps the off-beat approach causes critics to reject such books, but behind the jokes and digressions lies a deadly accurate picture of a great nation dying of comfortable self-delusion. In this way it carries a message that is true for other formerly great nations.

Vonnegut's previous novel, *Bluebeard*, deals more closely with the issue which Gilmore has missed in his article. In it, by using the character of an avant-garde artist in retirement as a mask for personal statement, he makes a case for the right of the artist to be free to paint/write/say whatever he damn well likes, and that critics have no right to define the territory or its boundaries.

SF is fashionable for a singular phenomenon, namely fandom. No other form of popular literature commands such tribal loyalty. This is in some ways its strength, but it is also a weakness and a snare. There is a tendency for readers to identify with the work so much that they become imprinted on it, imagining that having read it they are part of the process which created it, and that by extension they own part of the writer. This can cause problems for the writer who dares to stray from the accustomed furrow. I recall Robert Silverberg and Christopher Priest both declaring that they would write whatever books they chose to write, and to hell with the genre purists. Others have taken a similar line. Vonnegut's problem was that he was simply better known outside sf after *Slughterhouse Five* (which is as vulgar as it needs to be and no more) so he had to shout harder to make himself heard. If for one do not take it seriously that Niven and Pournelle's nasty little squib *Inferno* poked fun at him. The same book also derided conservatism and attempted a snow-job on Benito Mussolini.

The walls of the ghetto could come down tomorrow, if it wasn't for some of the inmates having come to regard them as more of a security blanket than a barrier. Attempts to define sf as a narrow end-product rather than a state of mind, a starting-point, will only serve to shore up those walls and continue the genre's isolation.

Stuart Falconer

Pontelond, Northumberland

Dear Editors

Much as I agree with most of Chris Gilmore's article "Why is Science Fiction?" (IZ 62), I think he overstates his case somewhat. He lists Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard as sf authors with mainstream credibility and says "two is a very small number." Well, I'd add Michael Moorcock with Mother London, Christopher Priest (one of the twenty "best young British novelists" of a promotion a few years back) and Geoff Ryman (especially recently, with *Wos*) off the top of my head.

As for the reverse process, "well-respected mainstream authors writing sf on the side": I'd add Doris Lessing for a start. If I restrict myself to British authors of mainstream sf (or fantasy, for that matter) I come up with, in no particular order: Martin Amis (*Time's Arrow*), A.S. Byatt (I won't be the first

person to point out that *Possession* is a hard-sf novel if you count literary criticism as a science – a novel of ideas it most certainly is), Maggie Gee (*Where Are the Snows* – included in the same issue's *Books Received* – and *Dying*, in *Other Words* amongst others – another Best Young British Novelist), Ian McEwan (*The Child in Time* and a one-time contributor to *Amazing Stories*), and virtually the entire works of Salman Rushdie and the late Angela Carter. This list is also off the top of my head, and doubtless other readers could add more names to it. If we have to have a label, "slipstream" will do as well as any other.

SF is a label attached to a publishing category. Looking back further, no-one denies that, say, *Breve New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are sf, but they were never published as such. I think we all agree that looking down on (genre) sf is little more than snobbery. I would also suggest that rigid adherence to a label is narrow-minded and limiting, and produces the kind of inverted snobbery that refuses to read/watch something because it's not sf, or fantasy, or horror, with a resultant lack of perspective.

Gary Couzens

Aldershot, Hants.

Dear Editors:

It's time to renew my subscription! Enclosed please find my cheque for \$52.00.

Perhaps the renewal should be sufficient approbation, but let me take this opportunity to compliment you on your fine magazine. I'm closing in on my 20th anniversary as a steady reader of *F&SF*, *Amazing*, and *Analog* – I've been reading Asimov's and *Omni* since their inception – and I've seen magazines like *Golgotha*, *Vertex*, and *Golgotha* come and go. After all this time and all that reading, the American sf magazine scene has become rather a "business as usual" proposition for me, but *Interzone* is fresh, friendly, and full of good reading – IZ is definitely the magazine I look forward to most each month!

I should also note how satisfied I am with the timeliness of my IZ sub – the new issue shows up each month in my mailbox and it arrives in excellent condition. How ironic that IZ can survive its journey across the Atlantic with little or no battering, but a subscription copy of *F&SF* can't survive the short hop from Connecticut to Maine without looking like it went through a shredder! One of life's not-so-great mysteries...

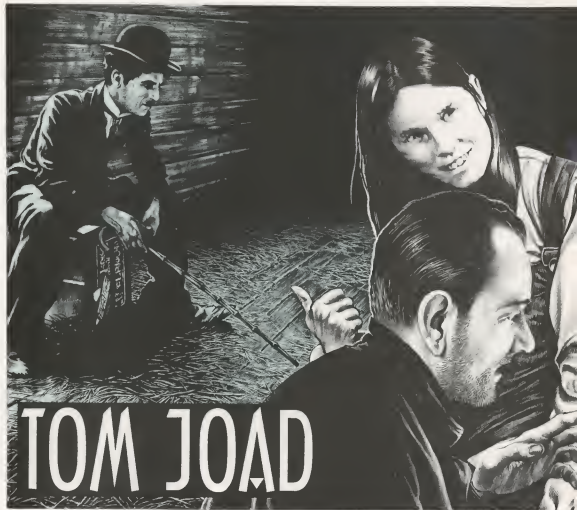
Bruce Canwell

Portland, Maine

Dear Editors:

I am responding belatedly to your plea for views on the prospect of a Fantasy magazine. However I'm going to voice

Concluded on page 35



TOM JOAD

"I was out this way before," Purvis said as they waited for the waiter to come back. "With the Drive Against Superstition and Perversion."

Ness sipped on his coffee and decided not yet to allow himself one of his maximum daily allocation of three cigarettes. On the tiny table between them were the remains of Party Official dinners. His partner had wiped his plate clean enough to infringe the work rights of the train's dish-washer, but Ness had left half his steak and all his greasy potatoes.

Purvis shook his head, remembering. "Bad business, the Drive," he commented. "Lot of folks vanished..."

He had been jumpy since Utah. He took things personally.

"Hell of a country," Purvis said, nodding through the window at the Red Star Special's jittering purple outline on the orange sands. The sun was so low the shadow elongated almost to the desert horizon.

Ness shrugged.

"It's right what they say about you, Eliot," Purvis said. "You're Untouchable."

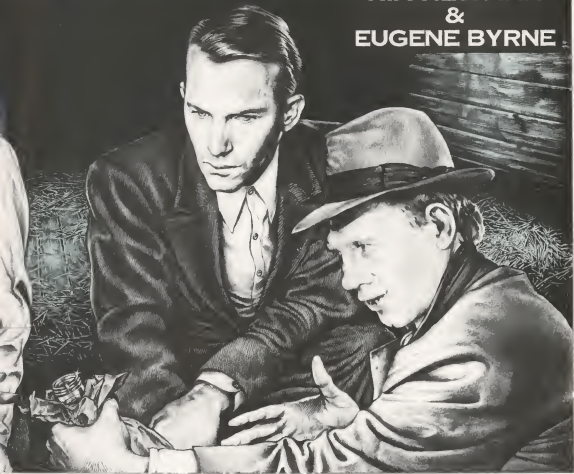
The Official Class salon, twice the length of the adjoining ordinary dining car, was almost empty. Two Agriculture Committee Inspectors gorged themselves at the other end. A silent bird presumably assigned to watch them ate frugally and alone, pretending to read a book.

Their waiter swayed along the car, a newspaper-wrapped package under his arm. He'd been impressed to learn the ugly little passenger in the oversized straw hat was Melvin Purvis, the Socialist Hero who took down People's Enemies like Dillinger and Floyd. He'd asked for Purvis's autograph, for his son who wanted to be an I-Man when he grew up. With a modestly delighted grin, Purvis had scrawled his name to a good luck wish. The boy would need it: the only Negro in the FBI was the one who cleaned the Director's personal toilet. Purvis had whispered in the waiter's ear, pressing money — silver, not the paper reactionaries didn't trust — into the man's palm.

"All part of the Master Plan," his partner now explained. Ness had won his Socialist Hero citation through months of meticulous paper-work with the

KIM NEWMAN & EUGENE BYRNE

Illustrations by Martin McKenna



Department of Parasite Regulation, and had stood unarmed in the background while Prohibition Officers made the arrests that broke up Boston Joe Kennedy's Chicago bootleg ring. He understood Purvis's usual Master Plan involved firing a gun at someone until they were incapable of surrender, then posing for photographs with smoking weapon and a cigar over the bullet-riddled corpses.

Purvis took the package. He skinned the paper away from a bottle-neck and held his purchase up to the light.

"I got a pal on the Buffalo run," the waiter explained. "He brings in stuff from Canada."

Purvis smiled. Ness didn't let his face show anything.

"Nothing's too good for the Man Who Shot John Dillinger," the Negro declared.

The agriculture officials and the poetry-lover eyed the hooch with fearful thirst. Sadly, Purvis handed the prize back.

"Sorry, comrade," he said, "this is too good. What I want is the rot-gut every other joe gets."

The waiter, plainly astonished, was disinclined to argue with the Man Who Shot John Dillinger.

"Give this to those comrades over there with the compliments of the comrade with the book."

Purvis grinned like a gnome as the Negro carried out his orders. One of the Agriculture Investigators coughed root-beer through his nose. The constant reader's eyes expanded like a fish's. Ness didn't laugh.

Purvis glanced at the attentive diner's book, *The White Ribbon*. "I believe Comrade Pound's celebration of the Great Pullman Strike the finest poetry in the American language," he said too loudly. "How do you think he compares with the insidious reactionary Thomas S. Eliot?"

The reader stuck his eyes to the page and stayed quiet. Purvis, having enjoyed his devilment, chuckled to himself.

"Who's going to inform on us?" he asked. "Remember, we're the Federal Bureau of Ideology."

The waiter returned from the next car with a bottle of honey-coloured liquor. Purvis unscrewed the top and the stench of strong boiler-cleaner caught in

Ness's nostrils. It stank worse than the Kennedy warehouse on Thirty-Eighth and Shields after the vats were smashed.

"Ahh," Purvis said, wincing, "perfect."

"Elko!" yelled the conductor from somewhere outside. "Elko, Arizona! One-hour stop!"

The train slowed. Dying light fell on the shapes of a small town. A couple of horses, a moving jalopy, a line of wooden buildings, shabby-looking Indians, kids playing baseball.

"Come on," said Purvis, "let's take a stroll."

The train would take on fuel and water and change more rolling-stock. When they'd boarded in Chicago, thirty hours back, the Red Star had been a passenger-train, but few people had the permit to travel all the way to California. At every stop a passenger car was unhitched and replaced with freight wagons.

Purvis stood, picking up his sack and tucking it discreetly into his arm. From his DPR days, Ness recognized the gesture of a habitual violator of the Prohibition Laws.

They alighted on the platform. A poster by the ticket office showed the Chairman beaming, arm around a Girl Pioneer. "Forward for Socialist Youth." The artist, who'd omitted the jagged scar on his subject's cheek, somehow contrived to balance Capone's benevolence with a gleam suggestive of an unpaternal interest in the fresh-faced, clean-limbed blonde. Ness wouldn't be surprised to read soon that Norman Rockwell had been commissioned to provide a pictorial record of oil-drilling in Alaska.

In an intricate, clanking ballet, railmen hitched a couple of cattle trucks. Purvis sauntered off, hooking his finger to indicate that Ness should follow. Beyond the train, well away from what little artificial light Elko provided, Purvis pointed into the dark. Ness could see nothing. Purvis put a finger to his lips, then cupped a hand to his ear. Beneath the hiss of steam and the calling of the railmen, he made out the sounds of men waiting. Not talking, but breathing heavy, concentrating. Out in the dark beyond the rail yard and the town, men were gathered.

"Rail-rats," whispered Purvis. "Going our way."

The Labor Mobility laws were designed to maximize the efficiency of a planned socialist economy, but every railroad in the country was overrun with hoboes. Ness had once spent a week with a smart engineer, redesigning freight-cars to make it impossible to bum rides. They'd received commendations, but the report wound up under a pile.

"When the train moves off, they'll come out and climb on," said Purvis. "We'll find ourselves a cosy cattle-wagon and have a drink with whoever turns up."

Purvis walked towards the first car that had been hooked up. "Take off your tie," he said. "Muss up your clothes. Imagine you've been on the bum for a month. Hoover won't know unless you report yourself."

"This isn't just a violation of FBI dress code. We're breaking laws it's our job to uphold."

"Untouchable, there are such things as lousy laws. Even in the United Socialist States of America."

Purvis slid over the door. An engineer walked past,

swinging a lantern. Ness prepared to pull his badge to justify their trespass, but the railman smiled and bade them good journey.

"Guys like him made the Revolution," said Purvis, dumping his sack into the car. "They know the difference between law and justice."

He vaulted into the truck. Ness refused his offer of a hand up and climbed carefully. Inside, the car was filthy.

"Welcome aboard, 'bo," said Purvis.

Without thinking, Ness started to brush his knees. His partner chuckled. Getting the idea, Ness let his suit stay dusty.

Besides whiskey of dubious parentage, Purvis's grocery bag contained a length of candle, two packs of cigarettes, old apples and some jerky. He took a few empty crates he found in the corner of the wagon, laid one in its centre, put out a couple more as chairs and arranged his table with the precision of the Plutocrats' Feast in *Intolerance*.

"All aboaaard," shouted the conductor a hundred yards further up. The train shuddered into motion. Two men and a boy appeared inside the car, as though from nowhere. Ness wondered what the new smell was.

"Shut the door," said Purvis to the younger man, a skinny, clumsy-looking fellow. "We got vittles we can share, but there ain't enough for too many."

"I'll be dipped in dogshit!" exclaimed the man. "Gonna have us a rare old time, ain't we just?" Ness figured his accent for something Southern. Texan? "I thank you kindly, Mister."

The man dropped his haversack and bedroll and drew up a packing case. The boy, who wore a golf cap twice the size of his head, stared at the food. When the cap came off, a tangle of hair poured out and Ness realized "he" was a girl in her late teens. Purvis cut off a string of jerky with his pocket-knife and gave it to her. She bit in greedily and almost choked.

The other hobo was the new smell. He wore too-big baggy pants under a too-small jacket, and had a tiny bowler-hat and a silly little cane. With his sharp toothbrush moustache and wide, scary eyes, he looked oddly like Reichskanzler Hitler. Ness had met some low-life but never anyone who stank quite as foul as the bum now holding out his hand. His mouth smiled, but his eyes said pure hate.

Purvis handed him meat. The man scuttled to the farthest corner to eat, picking fastidiously at the food with the tips of his fingers.

"You'll have to forgive mah friend's manners," said the Texan. "He's a queer old duck. He don't talk. Don't even know his right name. We call him the Tramp. Girl's named Thompson. Call her 'Boxcar Bertha' and she won't mind. Say thanks for the eatin', Bertha."

She nodded towards Purvis and carried on chewing. She might be pretty under the dirt, it was hard to tell.

"The name's Johnson," said the man, accepting jerky from Purvis, "L.B. Johnson, Texan born and bred, dispossessed by the Mexican Occupation."

"James Longford," said Purvis. "My buddy's Bill Brown. Where you headed?"

"Going to slip into California, get ourselves work on an out-of-the-way illegal orange ranch. Get a little sun on our backs. How about you?"

"Guy in San Francisco can get us papers. We can do construction work. Good money, good food stamps."

"A deal of people got on the train back there," said Ness. "They all on their way to California too?"

Bertha and the Tramp stopped chewing for a moment but Johnson blithely carried on. Ness knew he had been too pushy.

"Sure," said Johnson. "I guess a lot will be going by way of Nowhere. That's where the Kid here wants to go, but I ain't going near the place. No sir, no thank you."

"Nowhere?" said Purvis. "I don't understand."

This was what they were on the road for.

Johnson frowned. "How long you been on this train?"

"Since Illinois," said Purvis. "Hopped on round about Big Rock."

"Shoot," said Johnson. "You ain't spoken to nobody? Nowhere, Nevada, is where the squatter camp is."

"Squatter camp?" smiled Purvis, uncorking his bottle. "Why'd anyone want to squat in Nevada. It's all sand and mountains and snow."

Johnson helped himself to more jerky. "Trying to get over the state line, mostly. Folks wants to get into California. There's work in California. Good wages and fresh fruit and warm sun and cool mountains. Who wouldn't want to live in California?"

"Tom's at Nowhere," Boxcar Bertha cut in. "Tom's gonna lead us all to the Promised Land of Milk and Money."

"Like the kid says," shrugged Johnson, accepting the bottle, "Tom Joad's supposed to be there. I don't know if I believe that. If Tom Joad's real and at this camp, I figure there'll be I-Men all over like flies on fresh cowflop. A man like that's a threat to the Party. They call him an 'agitator'."

Johnson took a long pull on the bottle.

"Cheezisfuckinchristawmighty!" he gasped. "Yes sir, that's J. Edgar's business. Mowin' down anyone says anythin' different from the CP. Bastard got the Amish, an' the nigra Baptists, an' the Mormons."

Ness shot a glance towards Purvis. He was fiddling distractedly with an unlit cigarette, neutral half-smile set on his face.

"Hey!" Johnson held the bottle out to the Tramp, "you want some of this kinkypoo joy juice you gotta get your cup. Ain't no way you can ask decent folk to drink outta this bottle after your diseased kisser's been round it."

"I heard about Tom Joad," said Purvis. "Ain't he supposed to've croaked a CP boss in Atlanta for screwing folks out of their land during Collectivization?"

"Never heard that story," said Johnson. "Heard some others, though. Over Denver way he iced a buncha cops who gang-banged the only daughter of a widow-woman. Heard another how there was this shortage, people starving to death, good as, over in Iowa after Collectivization. Joad and his sidekick Preacher Casey broke into the official stores and gave food to the folks. There's plenty of stories about Tom Joad feeding folks during the famines."

"The bird sure gets around," said Ness.

"Yeah," said Johnson. "I've even heard of him turning up in Texas. There's stories about how he's helped Texican folk — those of us still there, that is — against the Mexes."

"Tom'll win back the land the Reds gave to the Mexicans," said Bertha. "Comrade, can I have one of them smokes?"

Purvis threw the pack to the girl. She chewed it open and pulled out a cigarette.

"One man can't be all these places at once," he said to Johnson. "Do you believe these stories?"

"I don't know," said Johnson. "Some of them sound real enough, but others are moondust. You hear the same stories about Jesse James, or Purty Boy Floyd."

Purvis's face was in darkness. Ness wondered if the Robin Hood tales about Floyd bothered him. No one said Boston Joe was anything but a parasite and a bourgeois counter-revolutionary, but plenty of saps rated some People's Enemies as heroes.

Bertha went into the shadows and took the bottle back from the Tramp. She handed it to Purvis, who unhesitatingly drank. He wasn't pretending, he really was drinking that rat-poison.

"Moondust?" said Purvis, encouraging Johnson.

"Sure. After all the Mormons got put into camps or shot down a few years back, the story is that Tom Joad walks out of the desert and leads some of them up into the mountains where nobody can get 'em and where they keep their crazy religion alive."

Purvis handed the bottle to Ness. He put it to his closed mouth. The booze stang against his clean-shaved upper lip.

Bertha sat next to Johnson, smoking like an old-timer. "Injuns say Tom Joad can turn bullets to water."

"Yeah!" laughed Johnson. "We were yakking with a 'bo the other day, a Navajo busted out of the reservation. He says Tom Joad is Navajo and he's given his people a heap powerful medicine that means nobody, not palefaces nor the Mexes, can steal their sheep again because if they try and shoot at a Navajo, the bullet turns to water."

Purvis laughed. "I'd sure like to meet Tom Joad. Even a glimpse of him would do me. You really think he's at this Nowhere?"

"I don't know what to think," said Johnson. "He's Moses, Santy Claus and Robin Hood all mixed up like my Mom's fruitcakes. If he's real, he's pretty much a regular guy. Not like in the stories."

"Course he's real," said Bertha. "Tom protects folks on the road. They'd be too scared to cross America if Tom wasn't there."

She took the bottle off Ness, and gulped at it as if it were mother's milk. Her big eyes watered. Ness wondered how she was getting by on the road.

"What's Joad doing at the camp?" he asked. "Is he there to protect people, or lead a rebellion?"

"Neither, the way I hear it," said Johnson. "Like Bertha says, he's gonna lead folks to the Promised Land, California. There are state troopers to stop people getting in because only Party Planners decide where people travel to. California's got a long border so it's easy to sneak past them, but folks're gathering at Lake Tahoe, which is a plum stupid place to try and get into California. Up in the mountains you're nowhere near decent roads or railroads. People are gathering because they think something's gonna happen."

"Maybe Tom Joad's going to part the lake waters and lead his people across," grinned Purvis, handing Johnson the bottle.

"With Pharoah Capone's troops and I-Men chasing, getting drowned," laughed Johnson. Suddenly, he was serious. "Friend, I can tell you're interested. But take my advice – it's all I can offer for your hospitality – don't go nowhere near Nowhere. About the state line, the railmen usually 'member they ain't supposed to give out rides and toss you off. No ill feeling, they just know they're being watched. Even so, you might be able to slip into California by staying on this freight."

In the light from Bertha's cigarette, L.B. Johnson looked old and sad, young face lined and battered.

"Know why they call it Nowhere? Chairman Al named it when he opened the Olympics in '32. He said, 'you'll find unhappy people nowhere in the USSA.' So now there's this place called Nowhere, and it's full of unhappy people. A gathering of the hopeless, all come together to chase moonbeams. The CP thugs in Debsville D.C. ain't going to like it. Whether or not there's any such animal as Tom Joad, sooner or later the Reds're gonna break it up. It'll be the Farm Collectivization or the war on the Mormons all over again. People will die. Stay well clear of Nowhere, friend."

"Untouchable," Purvis said, shaking him awake, "it's our stop."

As an FBI agent, he was supposed to snap to and become instantly alert. He assumed J. Edgar Hoover had never endured hours of L.B. Johnson's filthy jokes then tried to get his shut-eye on the filthier floor of a cattle car. He guessed Purvis hadn't been getting tight, but anaesthetizing himself. His partner's breath was sharp with bad booze.

"Reno, Nevada," Purvis explained.

The train was in a station. Thin dawnlight shone through the wooden slats. Purvis hauled the door open, the rasp cutting through Johnson's snoring but not waking the sozzled hobo. He jumped down and Ness followed. He tried to slide the door without waking their night companions. Looking back into the dark, he saw the glittering, alive eyes of the Little Tramp. Ness shivered, and shut away the icily piercing glare.

"The rummy made us, Purvis."

"Yeah, but he don't talk. LBJ and the broad, they've food in them. They wouldn't care if we were the Tsar of Russia and the King of England."

Ness still shivered. The desert was cold before sun-up. His back ached badly. He used to practise ju-jitsu three nights a week but had lost the habit. Some agents limped about with chunks of counter-revolutionary lead in them; his wound of honour came from years bent over a desk.

The porter had put off their cases in a heap. Standing by them was a cocky little fellow with a dandyish Western outfit, wide-brimmed stetson and bootlace tie. A star shone on his chest.

"Howdy, boys," the Sheriff said.

A toothless and enormously bearded deputy stood by, shotgun casually cradled. He wore patched overalls, only one shoulder-strap fastened.

Purvis took his crisp straw hat from the pile of

luggage, and set it on his head. "Purvis," he said, extending a hand. "Bureau of Ideology."

"An I-Man, eh?" The Sheriff whistled tunelessly.

"You'll be Sheriff Autry."

Autry smiled like a mooncalf. The deputy spat a stream of tobacco juice that missed Purvis's shoes but not by much.

"This is my Deputy. We call him Gabby, on account of because he talks so much."

"Yessir, Sheriff Artery," said Gabby. "Sure do wonder how you-all kin stand my constant chatter and aggravation."

"This is Eliot Ness," Purvis said. "You've heard of him."

Autry scratched his chin. "Nope," he said, "can't say as I have. You sir, Agent Purvis. Now you, I heard of. Got Dillinger, didn't you?"

Purvis grinned.

Sheriff Autry's coughing Tin Lizzie bumped along the road. Past Carson City was a wilderness. The Sierra Nevada rose ahead, a wall to keep trespassers out of California. Compared with the rail ride, the air was cooler, the country greener. Out of town, the car crawled uphill.

"No sign of this monkey at all," Autry yelled over ever-lowering gears. "These folks are all tetchd. Camp's a regular barrel of worriment. Squatters feudin' with the locals. Going to be an outbreak of typhus or scarlet fever or something. On top of that, I got a warrant to arrest a guy who don't exist."

"Tom Joad exists," Purvis said. "He's the Okie."

The Population Index listed seven Joads with Tom or Thomas among their forenames. One too old, two still in grade school and one definitely dead last year in a works accident. Two more had been watched for months: they led dull, blameless lives. Off to the People's Plant at eight every morning; home to wife and dinner at six every night. If the Index had every Tom Joad – under Minister of Manpower Resources Aimee Semple McPherson, a pretty reliable assumption – that left the Okie.

"I was out there," Purvis said. "Never found his place, but I could smell him. It was like that with Johnny Dillinger. Where he'd been, he left an invisible track."

Back in '31, the Oklahoma Tom Joad had mashed a man's skull with a shovel in a dance-hall brawl. Sentenced to seven years State Service in the McAllister Pen, he'd kept his head down and got out in the summer of '35. After that, nothing was confirmed. Joad's prison file had disappeared. Before Ness was detailed to the case, Purvis had toured the county where Joad's family came from. Due to incompetence or corruption, it had been skipped in the '20s by former Secretary of Agriculture Long's Collectivization drives.

"It was crazy," Purvis told Autry. Ness could tell his partner was about to mouth off. "The Kingfish left gaps all over the Mid-West. Frank Spellman is filling 'em in, sending federal troops to take over farms and turn them collective. Easy to plan, impossible to do. If the Okies could afford bullets for anything but hunting food, there'd be a shooting war. Spellman is beating them, but the dusters will beat him. No point in collectivizing land that's blown away. The Joad family

is supposed to have lit out West last fall, after Spellman sent in the cats to doze their homestead. That's about when we first started hearing stories..."

The only element of physical description consistent between all the Tom Joad stories was that the agitator had a scar by his eye, where a comrade had hit him with an axe-handle. Real or not, Tom Joad was the second most famous scarface in the USSA. Otherwise, he was a regular tall-short, fat-thin, handsome-ugly, black-white-yellow person.

The car was on the level again and he changed gear upwards. Ness caught a glimpse of water, Lake Tahoe.

"I gotta say this, guys," said Autry. "You seen bad stuff, I reckon, but Camp Nowhere is the worst. Most people here ain't human, not like you or me. A human man couldn't stand to be so miserable."

The Sheriff stopped his car behind a clump of trees. The I-Men got out: their plan was to walk into Nowhere, pick up the scuttlebutt on Tom Joad, then make a report. The camp stretched a quarter of a mile from the lake-shore, a mess of dull colours: mud shining in the sun; grey, brown and buff blankets raised as awnings and makeshift tents. It was strangely serene; no smoke from campfires, no sound of kids playing, no babies crying, no dogs barking, no machinery humming. There was no breeze, so not even the blankets moved. On Autry's reckoning, Nowhere had a population of 20,000 and growing, but it was silent in the middle of the day.

They were in among the tents and vehicles before they saw sign of life, a shawled old woman sitting on a heap of furniture, smoking a corn-cob. She spat in the dust as they walked past. As though the witch had made a signal, the place came alive. Ness and Purvis were mobbed by ragged kids. Little pot-bellies and big staring eyes accused the I-Men for having eaten. They asked for food, money, work. Purvis held out his hands and shrugged. The kids faded away. No one had anything.

"This place doesn't have organization," said Ness. "You'd think if there was leadership they'd get it tidied up, see to the sanitation."

"Yeah, Untouchable. Nowhere could do with a bureaucracy. A cadre of desk-jockeys would get it sorted."

The camp had no ground-plan. Tents were pitched at random, wagons and automobiles parked anywhere, most propping up FOR SALE signs. Every so often there was a garbage heap. On one a naked kid cleaned out already-spotless tin cans with his finger.

"Maybe Tom Joad has not arrived yet," said Purvis. "Maybe they're waiting for him."

Nobody did much of anything; one or two men moved around with fishing lines, but most sat or lay in the shade, staring into the middle distance. A man and dog tumbled in the dust in front of them, fighting over a pillow. The man, in vest and shirtsleeves, tried to tug the pillow from the dog's teeth. By the standards of Nowhere, the dog was well-fed. So was its adversary: in his fifties, stocky, with a bulbous drinker's nose. The cut of his clothes was good. A hip-flask stuck out from his back pants pocket. The pillow exploded, showering feathers. The man made things worse, shaking the pillowcase in exasperation while the dog retreated from the tip of his shoe. They all got covered in feathers. Purvis laughed.



"Harold," screeched a woman. "Those were my mother's feathers!"

"I didn't know your mother had feathers, dear," he drawled to himself.

The woman emerged from under a blanket-awning, tall and middle-aged, a touch too prosperous to be here. She snatched away the pillowcase.

"Harold, you're drunk!" she snapped, turning away.

"And you're a gooney bird, dear," said the man to himself, pulling his flask. "Tomorrow I'll be sober, you'll still be a gooney bird. Bringing us up here, when we could've been in California! Tom Joad, indeed!"

"Excuse me," began Purvis. The man jerked as if startled. "I couldn't help hearing you. We've just arrived and were wondering if the stories were true. Is Tom Joad here?"

"He is not, my friend," he intoned, lowering his voice, "if you want my opinion he never was, nor ever will be. I'd like to get out of here, but Amelia and the children are convinced they're going to meet him any day. Wanna snort?"

"Obliged," said Purvis, taking the flask and drinking.

"The name's Harold Bissonette," he said, brushing feathers from his clothes, "though Amelia prefers Bissonayyy. Accent grave over the e."

"What brings you to Nowhere?" asked Purvis.

Bissonette looked around furtively. "We're out of Wappinger Falls, New Jersey. I'm going to manage a collective orange ranch in California. In Ogden, Utah about ten days ago, we heard tell of Nowhere, and how Tom Joad would be here. My lawful wedded gargoyle insisted we come this way."

"You must be the fastest typist in the West," Purvis commented. "Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat."

They were in Autry's tiny office. During the last five days, Purvis had talked. Now it was time for paper-work, Ness typed. They hadn't shown their badges. There was no point scaring information out of anyone when a crust of bread got them yarning up a storm. Starting with Bissonette, they'd logged 126 interviews spread evenly across Nowhere.

"Remember," Purvis said, imitating Bissonette's distinctive drawl, "accent grave over the e."

Among the interviewees was Bertha Thompson, who had slipped off the freight and legged it to the camp. Ness felt sort of ashamed at having misrepresented himself to the girl but she was sunnily forgiving. "You're the first fellas in over a year willin' to put food in my mouth 'thout expectin' me to take anythin' else in there," she had explained.

"This burg could purely do with a few more parasites shaped like her," Deputy Gabby had commented. Boxcar Bertha had even taken that in good part, although Ness had felt his skin redden at the clod's crudity.

Tom Joad wasn't in Nowhere, but everyone expected him to show. The squatters had made it to this hole in the Sierra Nevada, using up the last of their food and gas. Now they sat around and waited. Autry was going crazy because some stole food from the local collective farms and, worse, people's gardens. The Sheriff had a bum named Robert Elliot Burns, a runaway from a Southern Re-Education

Camp, in jail, not so much for filching a scrawny chicken but to protect him from the Comrades' Vigilance Committee, who were shrieking to be deputized and turned loose.

They'd heard enough Tom Joad stories to fill a book. Everybody had at least one. Ness remembered Johnson's comment that stories told about the agitator were mostly refurbished tales about other characters. The most popular version of the fight in which Joad won his scar had him stepping in to defend his friend Casey from a Deputy who was about to bring him down from behind. Quite apart from the fact that this exact story, with Eugene V. Debs standing in for Casey, was one of many told about how Al Capone got his scar, it seemed obvious to Ness that this was a disguised Robin Hood story, with Friar Tuck turned into Preacher Casey.

This was not a job for I-Men but for collectors of folklore. Ness wondered how many times these tales had been dressed up. In the USSA, one face could do for Tom Joad, Abraham Lincoln, Frank James and Wyatt Earp.

Ness began typing the last page of the interview summaries.

"Sounds like a machine gun," Purvis said. "I can do more damage with this than with a gun," he told his partner.

"Damn straight," Purvis said, sloshing whiskey into a paper cup from Autry's water-cooler. "How many did you put away in Chi with Parasite Regulation?"

"When Joseph Kennedy's ring was broken, there were 895 arrests, 763 convictions. Seventeen illegal breweries, five distilleries, and 105 outlets closed down. Over a hundred thousand cases of liquor seized."

"This is probably from that batch," Purvis said, raising his cup. Deputy Hayes had got him the bottle. "I hear most of the hooch went missing from the PR warehouse."

Ness said nothing. It was true: few of the goods impounded during the Kennedy raids had been destroyed under supervision of his old unit. He'd been transferred and his successors proved lax.

"You did a good job, Untouchable. Too good, right?"

Ness squared up the typed sheets on the desk.

"Like me," Purvis continued, swilling more whisky. "I did a good job. Dillinger and Floyd, Baby Face Nelson. Ma Barker and Her Killer Sons: Floyd, Mad Dog, Ronnie and Clive. Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat. Got 'em all. Lined 'em up and gunned 'em down in the name of State, Party and Frigging Bureau."

"You shouldn't drink."

Purvis crumpled his empty cup and missed the waste-paper basket. He took another and filled it. The smell caught in Ness's nostrils. His partner had been drinking steadily.

"Why not? I've a trunk of Socialist Hero citations, and I'm still just outside Nowhere. Literally. Know Hoover's favourite commandment? 'Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods But Me.' The USSA's only got room for one Top Cop. I was reprimanded for 'encouraging bourgeois individualism' by walking around as a reminder of the way Hoover sets his fat ass in Debsville, taking the credit for everything every field agent does. This is my punishment, Untouchable. The

quest for the one People's Enemy there's no chance of me actually catching."

"You mean 'us'."

"I was letting a tendency to encourage unproductive hero-worship cloud my mind. I mean us. Hoover loves you too."

"I regard this assignment as an honour."

Purvis laughed bitterly. "I saw your file, Untouchable. PR dumped you on Hoover and this is his way of getting you out of his hair. We're official heroes, but the USSA doesn't need any more heroes. Joe Hill was a hero, but he had to go to Bohemia. Even that wasn't far enough, as you'd have noticed if you paid attention to Canadian radio."

"Hill was murdered by a Russian. Despite the European press, it was nothing to do with the Party."

"Come on, Untouchable. Remember the date? Who is there apart from the Chairman who has people rubbed out on February the 14th? Every year, regular as the Cannonball Express, there's a St Valentine's Day Purge."

Ness looked around. The Sheriff was off addressing a meeting, trying to cool the local lynch-lawyers. Ness wasn't sure the office wasn't rigged with a concealed wire-recorder.

He took out the last sheet from the typewriter. The report was complete. Now the agents had to add their own conclusions and suggestions.

"Are we agreed?" Ness asked. "We recommend supplies of food and gas be brought up to the camp along with state militia."

"Sounds jake," said Purvis.

"We help everyone get wherever they're legitimately headed. Any left over, we clear out with the militia. They can be returned to their point of departure."

"There's no case for letting them all into California," ventured Purvis, getting up to turn on the fan.

"These people got into this mess through their own stupidity."

"It's not good enough," sighed Purvis, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. "All we've said is, we can't find any Tom Joad here and we should use sticks and carrots to move these scarecrows along. Assistant Director Tolson's not going to buy that. We're not here to help people, remember. We're on a ghost hunt."

"I see that," agreed Ness. "We have to finish by saying who and what we think Tom Joad is."

"I'm all ears," said Purvis, head almost disappearing as he swung his feet up onto the desk.

"Tom Joad is a myth," said Ness. "Black propaganda to spread discontent and disrespect for the Party. It's so simple but so devious. My hunch is the British are behind it. Maybe Sidney Reilly himself."

"He was probably killed leading that cockamamie White Yank invasion from Canada in '24, but I like it otherwise. How's this play work?"

"In London, a council of Secret Service Agents and American exiles dream up Tom Joad stories. Like that guy Lovecraft the Brits paid to write horror tales about Re-Education Camps. Agents over here spread the stories. They probably start by telling 'em to hoboes like Johnson. After a while, people invent their own Tom Joad stories. It's cheap, it's clever. That's why I guess the Brits, not the Russkies."

"Untouchable, you're a genius," Purvis exclaimed.

"It's so dumb they're sure to buy it in Debsville. Fien-dish Brits, a shadow-man, a counter-revolutionary conspiracy. I love it."

"You don't believe it?" said Ness.

"That doesn't matter. I'm smart, and we're reporting to stupid men. What's important is what Debsville can be made to believe. Go on, write it up. Put Reilly in: you and Hoover are the only people ever to take that fraud seriously. Hell, put Lovecraft in; he's certainly International Grapefruit Number One. I'll gladly sign anything that means I go back somewhere where they have hot water on tap."

They stood by Autry's car on a road overlooking Nowhere. Ness scanned the camp with binoculars. In response to their report, Debsville had cabled back this morning. The I-Men were to await reinforcements. The order had been signed by Tolson, but the reinforcements weren't FBI agents. Some special unit under the command of the Central Committee.

"Food, medicines and gas are on the way," Autry said. "I can get five hundred State Troopers to the Reno railroad in twenty four hours. I reckon we can clear the place in two days."

"Where's your authorization?" asked Ness.

"I'm authorization, Untouchable," said Purvis. "The camp is a threat to law and order. I'm anticipating orders so we can move 'em on out as fast as possible when we get the go-ahead."

"What in hell is that?" said Autry.

A dozen long black automobiles hummed up the road, followed by a fleet of olive drab military trucks. The air was quite damp, but the convoy gave the impression of raising a huge cloud of dust. Purvis groaned, holding his hung-over head. The leading car, a Plymouth with official plates, rolled to a halt beside Autry's heap, a shark next to a hound-dog.

A man got out, and adjusted his pearl-gray fedora. The sharp suit he wore was almost a uniform. All black, including the shirt, with a white silk tie. Even tailoring couldn't cover the way the suitcoat's armpit bulged. Ness recognized the man.

"Frank Nitti," the fedora announced.

Officially a Chicago Party Boss, Nitti was Capone's personal enforcer. It was said that, if it came to it, he was the only man in the USSA with the power and the nerve to arrest J. Edgar Hoover.

The line of official cars pulled up next to Nitti. The trucks carried on. Ness counted twenty of them and they were still coming.

"Comrade, I'm Agent Ness. My partner is Agent Purvis, and this is Sheriff Autry. How can we help?"

"Follow us in, I-Man," said Nitti, standing on his running-board like a tank commander.

Still the army trucks came. Further up, some left the road. Men in full combat gear jumped out. Some carried rolls of barbed wire, which they pulled around the perimeter. Far from herding people away from Nowhere, they were keeping them in. As the last truck rumbled past, the Party cars started again. Autry followed. Nitti held his fedora to his head.

"He'd look funny if he didn't kill so many people," said Purvis. Autry flinched as if certain there were a microphone in his dashboard.

The black convoy drove straight into the middle of

Nowhere, pulling up in a ring in a large and fairly clear area. Already panicked by the soldiers, children cried and screamed while women ran around desperately gathering families together. Ness noticed Bertha Thompson, cleaned-up and in a dress, helping with a tribe of loose kids. She looked like an underfed schoolmarm.

Inside the arena formed by the parked cars, soldiers with fixed bayonets pushed or kicked away a few wretched tents and shelters. After things had quieted down, Nitti got off his car. From each of the other cars emerged four or five men wearing exactly the same outfit as Nitti. They carried machine guns. Purvis groaned quietly. Ness tried to feel nothing. The black-clad men were highly-trained professionals, the paladins of socialism, America's best.

Nitti was given a bull-horn. "Come on out," his amplified voice sounded. "We can't feed you all but we've got candy-bars for lucky children."

The previously-deserted area quickly filled. The most desperate came out first, the ones with least to lose. Nitti stood by his Plymouth, a no-man's-land of about ten feet between him and the scarecrow children.

Nitti motioned the three of them over. "Still no sign of Joad?"

"That's right," said Ness. "If you read the report we sent to Debs, you'll see we concluded Tom Joad is an apocryphal..."

"I don't need no poxyful report," said Nitti. He pulled out a candy bar. "Who would like this?"

If he expected a rush, he was wrong. These people were too weak to do anything fast. They were also surrounded by forty men with machine guns, not to mention a regiment of soldiers.

"Please comrade," said a skinny teen-ager, raising his hand and taking a tentative step forward. He had a mess of freckles and big wide, sad eyes. "I'd like that candy bar."

"If I gave it you," said Nitti, smiling. "What would you do?"

"Comrade, I'd share it with my family," said the kid, moving a little further forward. "There's a lot of us, and we haven't none of us eaten anything for days."

"What's your name, boy?"

"John."

"John," said Nitti, "I like the way you don't just think of yourself. I'll give you a candy bar for every one of your family you can bring here in the next five minutes. We got a deal?"

"I guess so, comrade," said John suspiciously. Then he made his mind up, turned round and ran, either to fetch his family or to hide.

"Why, it's Little Mel," said Nitti, turning back to the I-Men. He held out his hand. Purvis hesitated, then went forward to shake. "I haven't seen you since when? Must've been the Superstition Drive in Utah. Boy, we had some good times there, didn't we just? All them God-bothered crazies with the extra wives?"

Purvis looked at the dirt.

"So what's going down," said Nitti. "We gonna find Tom Joad? You and me should have a wager on who gets to whack the jackass? We should've brought reporters. They'd love that: Little Mel versus the Enforcer. America's top lawmen race to nail People's Enemy Number One."

"He's not here, Frank," said Purvis. "Like Ness says, Tom Joad's a line, reactionary propaganda put about by the Whites and the limeys. He only exists in people's minds."

Nitti reached into his overcoat and pulled out a cigar. He sucked and puffed a while. "Won't do, Mel. Won't do at all. The boys flew out, then busted our asses for hours driving all night to get here. The Chairman wants this business cleared up. You had your chance. Now let's try it my way."

John reappeared, along with three generations of his family. There were eight of them, and most looked worse than the kid. They all had freckles, and big glassy dog's eyes.

"Come forward," Nitti smiled to them. "Stand in a line."

The family hesitantly lined itself up ten feet from Nitti.

"Frank, for goodness' sake..." said Purvis.

"Hush, Mel. Don't annoy me."

"Okay," he addressed John's family, "can any of you good folks tell me where I'd find Comrade Tom Joad?"

The oldest man growled about having told them it was a trap. John stepped forward. "We don't know where Tom Joad is. We were told he might be coming here, but we've not seen him."

"You're lying, boy," said Nitti. He jammed his cigar into his mouth and reached backwards with his right arm. One of the men in black placed a machine gun into it, stock resting on his bicep, grip slotting into his hand. Nitti swung the tommy-gun down.

"I say again, you're lying. You must of been brought up wrong."

"Okay, I was lying," said John, holding up his arms. "Tom Joad passed through the other night. Came and spoke to us, lots of us. Said he'd get us all out in a few days."

"Now you're just trying to tell me what I want to hear."

"Frank," said Purvis, "what the hell else would you expect him to do?"

Nitti swung towards Purvis, pointing the gun. "I said it's my turn, Mel," he said evenly.

He turned back towards the family. The crowd standing behind them was thinning.

"Liar, liar, pants on fire..."

Nitti cocked the gun, and, aiming low to compensate for the recoil, directed a stream of fire across the line. He fired short, controlled bursts of four or five shots to keep his aim steady, not the continuous burst they show in the movies.

Ness flinched as a hot cartridge case hit his cheek. Autry shouted, but Ness's ears were too abused by the rat-tat-tat-tat-tat to make out what he was saying. Purvis looked away, hands over his ears. Bertha hugged children to her chest. The family danced, holes in their chests and heads gouting red.

Nitti used every shot in the fifty-round drum magazine, but one of the family still moved. It was John. After handing the empty gun to his assistant, like a surgeon returning a used scalpel to a nurse, Nitti took a .45 from inside his coat and stood over the teenager. He fired a bullet through his head.

"Good night, John-Boy," Nitti said.

Two days later, his cheek-bruise was gone but Ness could still hear the rat-tat-tat-tat.

"Getting to you, Untouchable?" Purvis had asked. "Try cotton in your ears."

Nine o'clock, and Nitti had been drinking since noon. So had the rest of his paladins. The finest America had, upholders of the law: including the one against the transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages.

"We offed about forty this morning," Nitti was saying. "This screwy preacher says 'I'm Tom Joad, the man you want,' like he had a death-wish. C'mon Mel, have another drink, don't look so blue, you're spoiling the party."

Purvis didn't need a second invite. He took the one-third-full bottle and tipped it into his mouth until it was empty. They were in Saloon Bar of the Lake Hotel. The whole building, the only hotel in Carson City, had been taken over by Nitti.

"No way was he Joad. I noticed these weird tattoos on his knuckles. On one hand he had the word 'love,' and on the other 'hate.' I keep up with this psychology you read about in magazines, and I figure here is a guy so sick at himself that he wants to die. Since I couldn't give him the satisfaction of killing him, know what I did?"

"I can hardly wait," spat Purvis. The way he was sassing the Chairman's top torpedo you'd think he had a death-wish, too.

"I had 'Greasy Thumb' cut off his fingers."

Jake Guzik, the paladin they called "Greasy Thumb," chuckled at the happy memory, and wagged his own fingers like a cartoon character.

"You're a sadist, Frank," said Purvis.

"If that's a fancy way of saying I enjoy my work, you're right. But it's the only language these folks understand. I'm going to keep going out to Nowhere every morning and shooting people until Tom Joad gives himself up."

"What if there isn't any Tom Joad?" Ness asked.

"We'll have had some fun," Nitti grinned. "And the USSA will be short a few parasites and reactionaries."

When Nitti's Family had showed up, the I-Men had accepted Sheriff Autry's offer of alternative accommodation and moved out of the hotel into rooms in the house attached to the city jail. Burns, the chicken thief, had been let out on his own sufferance, and quite sensibly skedaddled. Ness realized Autry's interpretation of the federal law was about as strict as his Deputy's interpretation of the English language.

Four in the morning, Ness hadn't slept more than twenty minutes since turning in about midnight. The ringing in his ears kept him awake. He'd never seen anyone shot before. With the DPR, he carried a gun but it never came out of its holster. Usually, he hung it up with his coat to prevent the weighted leather chafing on his shirt as he paced from desk to filing cabinet and back. In the Kennedy case, his big win, the arrests had been quiet, clean.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat...

His partner had the experience. The Peoples' Enemies he'd brought down weren't like Boston Joe; they went out in holocausts of lead rather than be hauled in for a show trial and a long walk to the chair.



Dillinger had been coming out of a movie house, where he'd just watched State Prosecutor William Powell purge childhood friend Clark Gable in Monaghan Melodrama, and Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd was turned in by the collective farm he had tried to take over. Both chose to shoot it out and wound up riddled with I-Man bullets. It was expected, especially after George "Machine Gun" Kelly disgraced the outlaw breed by meekly surrendering and earning the new nickname, "Yellowjacket." Although Special Agent in Charge, Purvis never claimed personally to have fired the kill-shots, always taking care to give "credit" to other agents whose aim probably ended the criminal careers.

Rot-tot-tot-tot-tat...

Ness wondered what it was like to kill someone. Also, if Purvis had drunk quite so much before. Probably.

He sat up in bed, sweating and shivering at the same time. His robe, hanging on the back of the door, looked for a moment like someone standing in the dark, staring at him with accusing eyes. The eyes of the Little Tramp in the cattle car, the family Nitti wiped out, the dirty children in Camp Nowhere.

He remembered Bertha Thompson turning away after the killings, refusing to acknowledge him. People he had interviewed on a reasonably friendly basis were too scared to shun him now, but there was a coldness they couldn't keep out of their eyes. To them, he was no different from Frank Nitti.

He pulled on his robe and stepped into the hallway. There was a thin light under Purvis's door. Ness knocked and entered. The bed was rumpled, but empty. A bottle, a dried amber rind left at its bottom, stood up against the pillow.

"Bang," said someone.

Heart hammering, Ness wheeled. Purvis sat in a rocking chair, hand pointed out like a gun. He was still dressed but had his jacket off. His holster was empty. He held his real gun loosely in his left hand. An unopened bottle stuck up from his lap. His red-rimmed eyes were as scary as the eyes that kept Ness from sleeping.

"Do you know that more FBI men shoot themselves than are shot by enemies of the state?" Purvis asked.

"Tomorrow, I'll cable Debsville. They have to know Nitti is exceeding his authority."

"A cable to Debsville brought Nitti, Untouchable. Forget the law, forget authority. Frank Nitti is the law, in all its bloody, arbitrary, blind stupid glory. We don't live under socialism. This is the Rule of Rat-tat-tat-tat."

Ness stood by the window and looked out at the silent streets. Now the Family were in town, no one came out at night. He suspected Autry had put out word, warning people to stay away. The Enforcer was a dark wind blowing through. Nothing could be done. People had to wait until the dust-storm was over and they could come out of their holes.

"Have you noticed what stupid assholes they are? They come back to the hotel at noon and get pie-eyed. Don't bother posting a guard..."

Ness kept quiet. Out on the street, something—not a cat—was moving.

"We could stop him. Crash a gas tanker through the front door and torch it..."

Outside town, the sun rose over the Sierras, casting a pale light across the city. By the statue of Upton Sinclair, something definitely moved. Ness turned. Purvis had his revolver aimed, barrel pressed under his chin, hammer cocked.

"One wrong move," he said, "and the I-Man's brains are on the ceiling."

Ness waved away the foolishness. There was something going on.

"This place is surrounded," he told Purvis. "Some of them are inside."

"Hot damn," Purvis said, waving his gun.

They both looked at the door. It was the only way in. Ness's revolver was back in his room, hung over a chairback in a holster.

In the hall, a tiny creak signified the presence of someone trying to keep quiet. Ness hoped several bottles of hooch weren't enough to blunt Purvis's legendary cool under fire. There was a crash as someone kicked in Ness's door. Thanking Providence and Karl Marx, Ness pulled open Purvis's door; his partner sprang from his chair, levelling his revolver to cover the corridor. A nice selection of backs clustered around Ness's doorway.

"Comrades," Purvis said, sounding sober. "Kindly put your guns on the floor and turn around."

If they all spun and shot, only one would go down. But nobody wanted to be the one. Three men turned. Two wore army uniform, the other was Sheriff Autry. They dropped guns, and their hands rose.

"Fellers," said Autry, "what can I say..."

"Make introductions," Purvis said, impatient.

"This is Major Smedley Darlington Butler," Autry explained, indicating a serious-faced officer. "Commandante of the soldier boys out at Nowhere."

Major Smed Butler and his aide were stiff-backed and ready to be tortured for days without saying a word, but Autry, more embarrassed than guilty, sang like a happy cowboy. Purvis asked questions, and drew out of the Sheriff an account of the group's intentions.

Evidently the Bureau's reputation was more fearsome than they knew. Butler and Autry had decided that they couldn't move against Nitti without first gunning the I-Men. Ness was flattered and alarmed they had tried to cool him first, assuming Purvis insensible.

"This is a nice little counter-revolution," Purvis commented. With a gun in his hand, he had a cockiness that was instantly impressive.

Butler snorted contempt. Despite his federal uniform, he seemed the epitome of White Yank. He'd be happier at a Klan meet than a union rally.

"C'mon, Mel," Autry said. "This ain't politics, this is killin'."

"Major Butler," began Ness, genuinely puzzled. "Why put your life at risk on account of a camp of scowflaws and reactionaries?"

The officer looked at Ness with something approaching pity.

"Call the squatters what you will," he said. "I daresay most are worthless hoboes. But it sits ill to be an accomplice to the murder of women and children. By holding the perimeter of that camp, we most surely are accomplices. This is no honourable man's conception of the profession of arms."

"Tell me, Major," sneered Purvis, "aren't there ideological officers in your outfit?"

"You'd be correct," said Butler. "We harbour three of the species, their main pastime being to spy on one another. Unfortunately, all have reported sick."

Purvis holstered his gun and looked thoughtful. Butler sat up at attention.

"You're going to kill Nitti and the rest?" Purvis asked. Butler nodded very slightly.

"We prefer to think of it as an execution."

Without thought, this honourable man would have killed them both, Ness knew. Somewhere, murder had become the main mode of political discourse in the USSA. It had started before the Revolution, with Roosevelt, Wilson, Mix, Crowley. In the last years, other names had been added. Hill, cut down by a "Russian disciple," John Reed, dead of "pneumonia" in Alaska. There were even whispers about the "premature coronary" that put Eugene Debs into the tomb next to Lincoln's and got the capital's name changed. Capone spent more on tributes than food programs. Perhaps that was why he'd purged his Chicago florist, Dion O'Banion.

"Autry," said Purvis "do you have a half-gallon of milk? I need to straighten out my head."

"Purvis," Ness protested. He could see how this was heading.

"Untouchable," he said, patting his gun. "Somewhere there's a line, and you have to step over it."

Would Purvis ever have left his gun in his room, no matter how safe he thought he was. Maybe he never thought he was safe. Maybe that was the smart way to be. Because Purvis had his gun and Ness didn't, he was deciding the Bureau's policy on Smed Butler and the six-gun Sheriff.

"So what are you going to do?" Purvis asked Butler, "go in there shooting?"

"No sir," said Butler. "Bravery has its place of honour, but a good soldier will not endanger his men through recklessness. We intend to dynamite the hotel."

Purvis whistled, and said: "okay, I'm in."

Autry whooped silently, and waved his fancy hat.

"And you sir?" Butler turned to Ness.

"The Untouchable is with us," Purvis said, before Ness could protest. "He's my partner."

Butler had been working on this for days. The laundry room of the Lake Shore Hotel was stuffed with explosives. All the night-staff were warned to take an early morning walk between five and six. The plan had been to take out the I-Men, then proceed directly to the hotel, which was staked out by a hand-picked group of Butler's loyal officers, and toss a torch into the laundry room from a back window, then run like blazes. It was crude but serviceable, Ness supposed. Nitti hardly deserved more finesse. As Purvis had pointed out, he was so secure in the cloud of fear he spread about him that he hadn't bothered to have anyone on formal guard duty.

Opposite the hotel, Deputy Gabby stood under a statue, accompanied by a leather-faced lieutenant named Randy Scott. There was a drunk bundled behind the pedestal. He flopped forward and Ness recognized Phil D'Andrea, one of Nitti's button men, his neck broken.

"Varmint staggered out for a whiz," Gabby explained. "Don't take kindly to no city folks pissin' on a hero of the Revolution like Comrade Sinclair, nosirree-bob."

"We oughta put a blindfold on that statue," Autry said. "The order came in to take it down when ole Upton 'vanished,' but we just plumb never got round to it. Made a speech in Carson, he did. Lot of folks was pretty inspired. We marched on Snob Hill, turfed them plutes into the streets."

Butler looked disgusted. Ness assumed he was not unacquainted with mansions on the right side of the tracks.

"Are the staff clear?" the Major asked Gabby.

The Deputy's face crinkled. "In a matter of speakin', yup, and, to a contrariwise way of lookin' at the sitch-yation, nope."

"Explain yourself, man."

"It's like this: all them clerks and porters and waiters is well on their way to the bus depot, but them fedora fellers has them some feminine company in there. I guess they's all been practisin' their push-ups."

Purvis swore.

"Unfortunate," Butler declared, "but a few worthless drabs can hardly be allowed to stand in the way of our operation."

"They's only one ole gal. They brung her back from Nowhere last evening. She went in kickin' and screamin'."

"That settles it. She has doubtless suffered the proverbial 'fate worse than death' and would as like as not take her own life, if she has not already been murdered by her abductors."

Butler was brushing this fly off his map with the sort of casual ease Ness might have expected of Frank Nitti. The Major ordered Scott to fetch a torch.

Ness looked at the sky. The sun was up, but it was only five-thirty. The drink-sodden paladins would be sleeping a while yet.

"Give me fifteen minutes," he said. "I'm going in."

"Untouchable..."

Ness shook his head.

"Don't call me that, Mel."

The lights were on in the lobby. In an armchair by a potted palm, Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, the finger-cutter, sat semi-conscious in his shirt-sleeves. His tie was cinched around his arm and on an occasional table next to him was a syringe and an empty vial. It figured some of these monkeys would be addicts.

Ness took a deep breath and stood over the man. "Greasy Thumb," he murmured, "wake up."

Guzik groaned in a brutal, though not unpleasant, dream. Ness slapped him. He jumped three inches off the seat and pulled back his fist. Ness, unsure where he fitted in Guzik's idea of how the world worked, stood back, the better to kick his face if he had to.

Guzik relaxed a little. "Whaddya want, I-Man?"

"The girl. I want the girl. Where is she?"

"What girl?" he said, shaking his head to clear it.

"Don't mess me around, Greasy Thumb. The boys brought a girl over here this evening. Maybe you had a piece yourself?"

"Oh her. The wild one. She's in one of the top rooms. You want a go, too? I thought you I-Men were clean-livers?"

"I want to get her out of here, Greasy Thumb. Her folks are worried."

Guzik shrugged. What a strange thing for anyone to want to do, he probably thought. "Big room, top front. I think the boys are finished with the gang-bang."

"Okay Greasy Thumb. You can go back to sleep."

Ness took the stairs as quietly as possible. The door he was looking for was ajar, the light on inside. There was no-one else on the landing so he stood, listening a while.

Above the sound of snoring from some of the other rooms, he thought he heard two people breathing. He grasped Purvis's knife in his pocket and eased the door open. His partner had given him the knife, telling him to keep things quiet. Ness had plenty of motivation. One untoward sound and Smed Butler would blow the hotel to the moon and Eliot Ness with it.

The room, probably the biggest in the Hotel, was full of fussy, frilly feminine decoration - flowered wallpaper, fancy curtains, expensive-looking washstand and wardrobe. A naked woman was tied to the bed, and a man in his undershirt, fat buttocks wobbling, ground slowly down on top of her. The girl's face, eyes screwed shut, was turned to him.

The woman, he realized, was Bertha Thompson. The man was Frank Nitti. Bertha didn't register his presence.

It would have been easy to pull out his gun and put a bullet in the back of Nitti's head. He might even enjoy it.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat...

Instead, he slammed the hilt of the knife into Nitti's skull, hoping to make a sharp dent. Half-unconscious anyway, the Enforcer was put out of it completely. Blood greased Ness's hand. He hauled Nitti, heavy and bulgy out of his sharp suit, off Bertha, and rolled him onto the floor. To make sure he was out, Ness kicked Nitti in the head. To make extra sure, he kicked him again.

Shaking incipient fever from his brain, he turned to Bertha. Trying not to look at her body, blue bruises and red cuts on white skin, he sliced through the strips of sheet that bound her to the bedposts.

"Can you understand me?" he asked, urgently. She nodded non-committally. "Do you know where your clothes are?"

She nodded again and sat up the way a woman of ninety would. She stood unsteadily and hobbled over to a small pile of clothing.

"Hurry," said Ness. "We have to get out quickly."

She looked at the clothes uncertainly.

"I need a bath," she said. "I'm not going until I've had a bath."

Her legs gave way. She fell and began to sob silently.

A terrible coldness spread through Ness's heart. He pocketed the knife and drew his gun, a .45 automatic. He released the safety and cocked it. He took two pillows from the bed and laid one over Nitti's head. He felt the man's boozy breath as he sandwiched the gun with the pillows. He made sure the barrel was pressed into one of the Enforcer's eyes.

Bertha was starting to cry out loud now. Much more, and she would wake the house.

"Here, Bertha," he whispered, "look..."

He jerked the trigger. A bullet jammed into the floor through a pillow and Nitti's skull. There was a sound

like a nail being slammed into floorboards. It wasn't quiet, but the hotel didn't explode.

Ness threw away the pillows and scorched feathers spurted. He tilted Nitti's head, one eye-socket a bloody crater, towards Bertha.

"Here, girl," he said. "Happy?"

Shocked silent, she wriggled into her dress and settled it around her grazed legs. Ness's hands were wrung out and bruised from the stifled recoil. Cold fire still burned in his head.

"Now," he said. "We leave."

His arm around her, he walked her firmly out of the room and down the stairs. Jake Guzik was still in the lobby, conscious this time.

"Have a fine time, Comrade?" said Jake. "You were mighty quick, and I heard a hell of a thump."

Guzik grinned. He had dirty teeth.

"This poor girl's had a terrible experience," said Ness sternly, playing the prissy I-Man. "You should be ashamed. I'll be making a full report to Debsville."

Guzik shrugged, knowing anyone with Nitti was invincible. Ness pulled the girl towards the revolving door. He told her she'd be all right, they'd get her a doctor.

There was a noise upstairs. Bumping. Voices. Ness saw horror on Guzik's face, as if a ghost had appeared. From the doorway, he looked back at the lobby. The wind was taken out of him. On the stairs, his face half-red, naked from the waist down, a spasming animal keening escaping from his mouth, stood Frank "The Enforcer" Nitti. There were enough brains left in his smashed skull to keep him tottering. Ness pulled his .45 and got off another shot. Nitti's shoulder exploded, and he staggered back, belly and genitals bobbing. The shot sounded in the lobby like a drum-roll. Now, Butler would toss the torch.

Beside Nitti appeared a rabid little man with a Tommy-gun. Vince Coll, one of the New York Party fedoras. Guzik's mouth was open. He must think he was overdosing. The Enforcer stumbled and fell - dead at last? - as Coll opened fire. Bullets ploughed through the carpets, raising wood-splinters in a line towards Ness and Bertha. Guzik yelped and danced back, a bullet in his ankle, his shoe full of blood.

Ness hit the revolving door, dragging Bertha with him. The door spun on its spindle, then stopped. Bertha shrieked, her foot caught. She jiggled, trying to get free, and Ness turned in the confined space, looking through dusty glass at the lobby, which was filling with men.

They were nicely trapped in this triangular wedge. Coll ambled across the lobby, raising his Tommy-gun and convulsively chewing. He aimed low, and fired a burst, jerking the barrel up.

The glass smashed as the first bullets struck, and Bertha's foot got loose. Ness pushed, and they were spat out of the hotel, stumbling down the front steps and away from the building. The door, pushed by the gunfire, spun like a grinder, and a scatter of glass flew out of it. Taking Bertha's hand, Ness ran across the square.

Behind, the hotel lifted from its foundations and flew apart. A wave of heat and sound knocked them flat, and burning rocks fell all around.

Ness was in the dirt, his head hammered. Hands pulled at him. Bertha was babbling about a doctor.

"Come on, Eliot," said a voice through the noise. "Get up and dance."

Ness tried standing. It was surprisingly easy. None of his major bones were broken. He ran his fingers over his face, then looked at his hands. Blood smeared on his left palm, and he was aware of the throbbing in one side of his face.

"You'll have a scar," Purvis said. "Like..."

There was another explosion, smaller. Ness turned to where the hotel had been, and saw a clump of masonry falling in. The building didn't exist any more. Dotted around the rubble were a number of medium-sized bonfires. The square was full of people, gawking.

"Where's the girl?" asked Ness.

"She ran off," said Purvis. "She's okay. Well, as okay as I guess she'll ever be. Autry called a doctor."

Butler waited with two of his men, handing out orders.

"A nice operation, Agent Ness," the Major said. "I salute you, sir."

Ness just nodded. He was tired, and wanted to go back to sleep.

"The job's not over," said Purvis. "We have to clear out Camp Nowhere before news reaches Debsville and Capone orders reprisals. Butler's sent word to his men out there to give the squatters some good prods. It's CYA time for us. In a minute, you and me are going to go running into the street as if we haven't a clue what the hell's happening. We'll organize the fire-fighting and rescue operation and generally pretend we care very deeply about what happened to Nitti's nutsoes. We'll take it from there..."

"That Nitti, Mel. He wasn't human, he..."

"You're telling me."

Lieutenant Scott ran up to Butler and threw a salute. "Sir, Captain McCrea reports they're having trouble with the civilians out in Nowhere. They won't move out. Some say it's a trick to lure people into the open and kill them one by one."

It was a dumb idea, but given Nitti's behaviour, it was natural people wouldn't trust the army. Butler looked perplexed and shook his head in frustration. This wasn't in his line of work at all.

Ness wiped blood away from his face-wound. He was lucky not to have lost an eye.

"Let me try something," said Ness. "You stay here and see what you can do. I'll go over to the camp with Major Butler and try to get those people moving."

"Okay," said Purvis. "I'll see you back here as and when..."

"Mel, if Greasy Thumb Guzik is still alive, finish him off for me. He's a material witness."

"What are you going to do later, Major?" he asked as the staff car, driven by Lieutenant Scott, began the climb to Camp Nowhere. "No matter how innocent you can play it, they'll get you."

"I know that, Agent Ness. I've made arrangements to borrow those fast cars Nitti brought here. The day after tomorrow, my officers and I intend to apply for asylum at the British embassy in Mexico City."



"You're giving up everything."

"I give up nothing," said Butler, lighting a cheroot. "Everything has already been taken from me. I'm like these wretches here. My family lands were confiscated. All my tenant farmers, white and nigras, were expelled. Now the profession to which I was born has been stained. So as Charles Marx would have it, you take away everything a man has, you set him free once more."

Scott stopped the car outside the camp. Crowds parted to let the vehicle crawl to a halt. The only people talking were soldiers, mostly farmboys who'd joined up for three squares a day and now saw their own folks in the deluded suckers who'd bought the Tom Joad lie and used up the last of their food and gas to get to this mountain rat-hole. Butler's aide had been right. Nobody was making a move to leave. All the tents and makeshift shelters were all exactly in place. Men, women and children stood around under the climbing sun, still waiting for their deliverer.

Ness doubted the squatters could even be forced to go at bayonet-point. There must be twenty thousand individual souls here but they acted with one mind, one intention. To try and make any impression on them would be like putting your fist into a pool of water and hoping there'd be a hole when you took it out again.

The pain in Ness's face had settled down to a dull throb. He and Purvis could cover themselves, and Butler would make it over the border. That just left twenty thousand squatters to save.

He pulled up the collar of his overcoat and tipped the brim of his hat downwards over his eyes. He stepped out of the car, and looked around. The man he had been when the sun went down last night was a stranger to him, and he hoped he could walk into the camp clean and cold.

A thin figure stood up from where she had been lying. It was Bertha Thompson, her face scrubbed, her hair skinned back. She still wore her bloody, torn dress. Inside, she must be steel.

Ness still felt the kick in his hands as he shot under the pillow.

"Sister," he called to her.

She whimpered, but controlled herself. He tipped his hat, and showed her his marked face.

"Tell the people, sister."

She nodded.

"Tell the people Tom Joad is here."

He sat on the back of a flatbed truck, smoking a bent cigarette. When he flicked the butt and looked up, a solid ocean of people stretched before him. People all spoke to one another in low voices. The name "Tom Joad" emerged again and again from the shambling and hissing of the crowd. Kids were clustered around his feet, just looking up at him. If anyone recognized the man who had interviewed them days earlier and stood around while Frank Nitti murdered a family, no one said anything. Until that moment, he had been sure he could never pull this off, but he hadn't reckoned on the people's need for Tom Joad, their need to believe in their hero.

He stood up, and took off his hat, showing the new scar. People gasped.

"Frank Nitti is dead," he said, projecting his best lecture-circuit voice. "I just dynamited his hotel."

There was a ragged cheer.

"When the Party find out, they'll want to track down every one of you and kill you. That's why you must get out of here right now. The Party will be after all of us. So don't waste any time. Pack up and get out. The road to California is that way. As soon as you're out of here, the safer you're going to be..."

"Tom," shouted a man who tossed his hat in the air. It was Harold Bissonette, Ness was astonished to realize. "Tom, will you be coming with us?"

Ness shrugged, and realized what he said next would decide it. If he sold them on Tom Joad, they would scatter and be saved. If not, this would be a killing field.

"You go on ahead of me, folks," he said, thrilled by the bright eyes all around him. "I've things to do back here."

The words came to him.

"I'll be all around in the dark. I will be everywhere wherever you look. Whenever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, whenever there's a cop beating up on a guy I'll be there. I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad, I'll be in the way kids yell when they're hungry and they know their supper's ready. Wherever people are eating the stuff they raised and living in the houses they built, I'll be there too."

This hobo jungle was much like the last, although – being in Alabama – there were more blacks than whites grouped around the fire. Ness was used to these fringe gatherings now. In theory, Purvis and he were still being punished, but this assignment was being drawn out.

One thing about working for Hoover was that he put the Bureau ahead of everything, including Justice, Truth and Party. If anyone in Debsville had an idea what had gone down in Nowhere, it had not been mentioned. Ness and Purvis picked up extra citations and were kicked back out into the field. The only casualty of the conspiracy was Sheriff Autry, who had resigned, ostensibly for letting the chicken-thief get away. Autry had quickly returned to state service as Carson City's best-loved singing dog-catcher, with Deputy Gabby as his assistant. Smed Butler was in Mexico, leading some jumped-up White Yank regiment with comic-opera uniforms. Bertha Thompson was in California, somewhere. And Frank Nitti had more parks named after him than any other Hero of the Permanent Revolution.

As the sun went down, the hoboes had been telling Tom Joad stories. They were wilder, more extravagant now. One claimed Tom Joad was a ghost in a black cloak, and that he carved his initials on the cheeks of the Party goons he killed. Another, a scrawny Negro who called himself Fetchit, told of how, somewhere over Nevada way, Tom Joad dynamited that murdering sonofabitch Frank Nitti and how Nitti had staggered out, his fancy clothes in tatters, only to be confronted by the avenging Tom Joad, who strangled him with his bare hands. The tale-teller went through all the motions, popping his eyes out and calling on the Lord for forgiveness as he re-created Nitti's well-deserved end.

"That night," Fetchit said, "Marse Tom led a hundred thousand folks to California, into the promised land. An' he still out there..."

Which was true enough, in Debsville's eyes. Which was why Ness and Purvis, as the Agents who had come closest to catching the phantom, where now headed South to investigate a report that he might be in Mobile. They were well-placed to play their dangerous game, but they couldn't go on forever. There was a limit to the number of agitators they could ignore, the number of informants they could expose to their fellows.

Ness liked to think they were making a difference. One day they'd get caught, exposed and purged. Then they might be real heroes.

"That's some story," Purvis told Fetchit. The Negro grinned, and took a pull on the bottle.

"It weren't quite like that," said a skinny white guy with a cap pulled low over one eye. "I was there."

"You saw Tom Joad?" asked Purvis.

The hobo nodded, then qualified himself. "Missed the shootin', 'cause I showed up just as everyone else was fixin' to move out. Saw a feller who said he was Tom Joad. Said he'd killed the Enforcer and all troubles were ended. Might have been him, might not. Sure talked a fine speech, but unlike a lot of them talkers, he could do a deed or two on the side."

Ness shrank back into the shadows. The man looked familiar, but so did everyone they met on the road.

"Why ain't you in California still?" Purvis asked.

The hobo shrugged. He was a quiet, rangy man, and his voice was flat, the clipped tones of some mid-west farm.

"Didn't take to oranges, I guess."

The hobo rubbed his cap, and Ness saw the long-healed scar by his eye. It was like the red badge he had picked up in Carson City.

"That feller," Ness said. "The one who made the speech. What did you reckon? Was he Tom Joad?"

The hobo gave a sad smile. "Well, if he weren't then, he sure is now."

Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne will be familiar to our regular readers from their two previous stories about the United Socialist States of America: "In the Air" (IZ 42), about Buddy Holly meeting Jack Kerouac in the late "Caponist" era of the 1950s; and "Ten Days That Shook the World" (IZ 48), about Dashiell Hammett and others being caught up in the Eugene Debs-led revolution of 1917. ("Tom Joad," with its 1930s setting, plugs the historical gap between the two earlier stories.) Kim Newman's latest novel is *Anno Dracula*, out very soon from Simon & Schuster. Eugene Byrne's first solo story for *Interzone*, "Cyril the Cyberpig," should be appearing next issue.

Back issues of *Interzone* are available at £2.50 each (£2.80 overseas) from the address shown on page 3.



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Ansible Link

David Langford



All is flux in British sf circles. The Café Munchen, London pub venue of a million Forbidden Planet signings, has turned into "The Conservatory." Visitors to London's monthly sf meeting at the Wellington pub (near Waterloo) found the place being noisily rebuilt and due to become an "up-market wine bar" by the time you read this. (SAE to 94 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU for details of whatever new venue emerges.) "Sou'Wester," our 1994 Easter sf convention, had such trouble with its planned Bristol hotel that it's been forced to move the south-west up to Liverpool. (Contact 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.) After which, I won't be surprised if next Interzone's column gets moved to page 94...

Rulers of the Sevagram

Pot Codigón, of whom the late Robert Heinlein said "has a very dirty mind," won the Arthur C. Clarke sf novel award for her Synners. She lives in the USA but visits Britain as a guest of Mexican in 1993 (enquiries to 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, W. Midlands, B66 4SH).

Arthur C. Clarke was here for his 75th birthday, and the Prime Minister himself (answering a parliamentary question about Clarke and space research) not only welcomed him to the House of Commons but ringingly declared: "We shall continue to take initiatives...in pursuit of space priorities." Haden realized there was anything to continue. After media coverage of current Clarke projects, I fantasized an aged Tory MP enquiring, "Is my right hon. Friend aware that the man Clarke whom he has just welcomed intends to publish a doubtless pornographic Playboy article on sex in space, under the repugnant title 'Nasasutra'?" Meanwhile Privote Eye revealed Clarke to be a pseudonym, in a snippet about severe L. Ron Hubbard infestation in (of all places) Russia... shortly to enjoy "a million-strong edition of one of Hubbard's turgid and posthumous novels, Imperial Earth." Gosh!

Lionel Fonhorpe – or, to quote his letterhead, "The Reverend Lionel Fonhorpe, B.A. (Hons), F.C.P., F.B.I.M., Cert Ed., Member of the Welsh Academy, Member of Mensa, Managerial, Editorial and Educational Consultant,

Radio and Television Broadcaster, Author and Lecturer" – has inundated me with artwork for his new story sequence, perhaps autobiographical, about a giant bearded fighting missionary frog called the Rev Dr Hugh John Green (geddit?). Not to mention "Deacon Ribbit, Wulfrog the Bullfrog, Thomas the Tyrannosaurus and the Frog-lydes." Could this be the next cult book?

William Gibson's poem Agrippa (A Book of the Dead) was discussed all over the computer press as well as in real newspapers, since it comes on a disk which erases the text as you scroll through it. Choose the limited edition at \$450 or the special one at \$1,500. My full review appears in the accompanying Interzone Dumb Ideas Supplement, which goes one better by self-destructing before you actually read it...

Terry Prochett, omnipresent and pantheistic as ever, popped up in SF Chronicle to explain, "The Mort film hit a stumbling block when an American film company said in effect: 'we like it, but Middle American consumer research says to lose the Death angle, please...'"

Brian Stobleford had a front-row seat at the Savoy Books appeal against the seizure of (and destruction order on) their controversial novel Lord Horror and comic book Meng & Ecker #1 – he was an expert witness, along with Michael Moorcock and Guy Cumberbatch (a psychologist who investigates media effects for the Home Office). All three declared the publications devoid of any ability to deprave and corrupt, "and argued forcibly that those who labelled Lord Horror 'anti-semitic' while talking to the press had completely mistaken the rhetoric of the fiction (a point the assembled gents of the press seemed to take aboard, although their headline writers didn't)." In fact the Crown didn't bother to defend the seizure order on the novel, having divined that the comic was a safer target. Although the experts endorsed it with equal firmness, the judge and magistrates dismissed all this and found that Meng & Ecker was obscene although Lord Horror wasn't. A further appeal might well follow.

Jon Watson is exceedingly proud of his export deal whereby Lithuanian published a Watson story collection in exchange for vast numbers of amber

beads. Mind you, "a stall holder in Northampton market informed me that the market has really dropped out of amber beads and lapis lazuli since the Iron Curtain came down." Since The Fire Worm has appeared in Poland, Ian is now word-perfect with the traditional "The Lambton Worm" in Polish, "ideal for challenging people to sing in pubs." I'll spare our typesetters the translation of "Whisht, lads, haad yor gobs / An' Aa! tell ye aall an aaful story..."

Infinitely Improbable

Books & Bookmen. GW Books, the Games Workshop sf/fantasy line which went into suspended animation a while ago, might yet return – from a new publisher too obscure to mention here. Top-secret conferences are being held, and my moles are under every table. But what of the Midnight Rose collective of shared-world anthology editors? Sf pundits are mystified as to why, when their Temps achieved startlingly high midlist sales in Penguin's Roc imprint (15,000 copies allegedly sold out, with a reprint planned to sell alongside the Eurotemps sequel), the hero editors should be searching so assiduously for another publisher.

Mogazines. As I write, Fontosy Toles 8 for "Spring 1992" seems to be still on hold while the possibility of a better distribution scheme is investigated. Paul Brazier's Nexus 3 is due out "Octoberish" ("which might extend to Xmas"). The small-press New Moon is in eclipse owing to editorial illness. And the Ohio Cleveland Ansible is no relation at all.

The Curse of Ansible: following the bit about Leo Stobleford's nasty experience in London's "Forbidden Planet" bookshop (having his own copy of a book confiscated by a zealous security thug), his father Brian reports that FP's almost godlike Dick Jude has made amends with an apology plus copies of the book and its sequel. Awed by its influence, this column will next take up the cudgels for all underpaid authors called Langford.

Ten Years Ago: the Science Fiction Book Club run by Readers Union (David and Charles) received its official death-knell, along with RU's other monthly reprint book clubs – "basically an out-moded idea," said my D&C contact.

Dinosaurs, Comics, Conan – and Metaphysical Romance

Andrew Tidmarsh talks to Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is Canada's most eminent novelist, poet and critic. She will be best known to readers of *Interzone* for her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985): shortlisted for the Booker Prize, 1986; winner of the Canadian Governor General's Award, and of the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Science Fiction; made into a poorly received, somewhat monotonous film. (The author herself prefers *Blade Runner*.)

By the time her first novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), appeared, she had already established her reputation as a poet. (Two selections of her poetry, from 1965 to 1975 and from 1976 to 1986, are available in the UK from Virago.) Two other novels, *Surfacing* (1972) and *Life Before Man* (1979), are of particular interest to readers of the fantastic, and her short-story collections *Murder in the Dark* (1983) and *Good Bones* (Bloomsbury, 1992) contain "sf" stories. I spoke to her on 9th May 1992, during the 25th Brighton Festival. A number of other interviews of varying quality are reproduced in the volume *Conversations* edited by Earl J. Ingersoll, available in the UK from Virago.

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939. She has an older brother born in 1937 and a younger sister born in 1951. As a child, she recalls being preoccupied with "great panoramas of dinosaurs which we would make out of plasticine" and "with other planets. I had another planet, it was my other planet. It was populated by rabbits – I know this is going to sound rather dumb – by flying rabbits: they had capes like Superman. We were the comics generation, of course, so instead of TV it was Batman and Plasticman, though I was never very keen on Superman. I found him kind of boring. I preferred Captain Marvel, that was quite a zany comic: there was a small worm who was going to destroy the world. A very smart worm!"

What about films?

"Those I came to late, because I grew up in a fairly isolated way in the north of Canada where there weren't any movie theatres. There was a little town, a village really, but you had to get to it by water. It was wilderness,



Margaret Atwood

and I mean deep wilderness. The difference to me between Canada and Europe is that, in Europe, you really have to go out of your way to die in the wilderness. You have to make an effort whereas, in Canada, you can do it quite easily. Indeed, there are stories every year of people wandering off into the woods and never coming back; and I mean never coming back. So, films: I remember being terrified out of my wits by *Snow White*. A lot of children are deeply frightened by that movie. They're also frightened by *Pinocchio* and, in a different way, by *Bambi*. And I remember being terrified by a film called *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948): this was before I knew

anything about the book, the earlier movies, anything."

Books?

"I used to read those lurid sci-fi magazines, the ones with the monsters. I remember the period of pulp science fiction very well. Then I read stuff like *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) and other stories by Ray Bradbury, one in particular, a creepy one, in which there's a house and if you go out of the wrong door you're amongst the dinosaurs. I read *Brave New World* – and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, fairly close to the time it first came out. Later, of course, I read other books in the utopian tradition including Plato's *Republic*, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*,

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. I read *Gulliver's Travels* as a child because, for some reason, people were classifying it as a children's book. I guess they gave it to children because of the talking horses. I read a lot of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne and other 19th-century people who wrote strange books like that. I started writing when I was 16. So, I read a lot of these books between the time I was 12 and 25."

She also read – and fondly recalls – the Conan stories of Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft's macabre fantasies. "I read for enjoyment as much as possible. If I find I'm not enjoying a book, I usually stop. But I also read a lot of 17th-century Puritan literature because I had to pass a five-part examination: that was one part. I had to do that."

"My PhD topic – for the PhD that I never, in fact, completed – was 'the English Metaphysical Romance.' It took in George MacDonald (1824-1905: best-known for his allegorical fantasies *Phantastes* [1858] and *Lilith* [1895]), to begin with, and went all the way through to people like C.S. Lewis (1898-1963: best-known for his Ransom trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* [1938], *Perelandra* [1943], and *That Hideous Strength* [1945] and for his chronicles of Narnia). That was my area, so I've read things most people have never heard of: *The Purple Cloud* (1901) by M.P. Shiel. *A Crystal Age* (1887) by W.H. Hudson. That's very peculiar. In it, he goes to the future and it turns out that, in the future, people are sexually neutral and live in beautifully decorated 'Arts & Crafts' country houses where they do all their own costumes and play the lute but they have no sexual feelings except for two that have been singled out as gene-bearers and they are called 'the Mother' and 'the Father.' Of course, the poor hero falls in love with one of these sexually neutral women who doesn't know what he's talking about. It gets very sad. But it's Hudson's solution to the population explosion, because these country houses are limited in size and are surrounded by large areas of forest."

"So, *The Handmaid's Tale* probably emerged from several things, one of them my knowledge of American Puritan society which is very totalitarian – what we would now call totalitarian. You could be arrested for flirting or for gossiping: these were criminal offences. So, I knew that. And I was watching the rise of the religious right-wing in the States: that has always existed, has always been an undercurrent. And I was self-consciously writing in the tradition of other women that goes right back to *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; Ursula Le Guin, whose *Left Hand of Darkness* is excellent (as is her stuff that is promoted

as for children, the *Earthsea* trilogy: that's really excellent); Joanna Russ; etc."

"The only way you can really deal with material like this, 'what if' material, is to have people talking about it at the dinner table, discussing it, thinking about it, or having a dream or nightmare about it. Or else, to really act it out: you can handle ideas much more effectively that way. It was creeping into another book I was writing, as conversation – people were saying 'this is what's going to happen, etc...' – and it was getting very disruptive because it didn't belong. So, I thought, since I can't stop this material from getting in, I should just do it as a book on its own. I took it out of the earlier piece: it doesn't appear anywhere else. I have a couple of other short pieces and poems that come out of sf material fairly directly in the volume *Murder in the Dark*: in one, for example, men take over the cooking. And I have a couple more short pieces coming out in the autumn of 1992 in a book called *Good Bones*. It's a collection of short, peculiar pieces of which, I would say, about four are sf."

So Margaret Atwood appears quite comfortable with the term "science fiction." As she explains: "Science fiction is a way of looking at things, and it's a way of looking at things that is very hard to do in any other kind of fiction. It's a creation of a different kind of metaphor. None of us have actually been to Venus so, going to Venus has to be a metaphorical construction. Then you try to figure out what it is conveying, this journey to Venus? Well, it could convey all kinds of different things: just one of them is madness. Let's stir into the equation the fact that I was brought up in a scientific household. My brother is a neurophysiologist working with the synapse: once you're into the micro-world you're essentially on Mars, somewhere that we don't ordinarily live. My nephew is a theoretical physicist. I've put scientists into my books as characters from time to time, and have one novel called *Life Before Man* in which one of the characters is a paleontologist."

"Then again, the distant past or future might as well be Venus. I was deeply impressed by *The Time Machine* as a child: I found that riveting."

"But I call *The Handmaid's Tale* speculative fiction. It's not science fiction in the classic sense, that is, there is no time travel, there are no other planets, there are no things that we couldn't do now. In other words, we have the technology to create the society in *The Handmaid's Tale*: we could do it. While I was writing, I kept a big scrapbook of all the clippings and references that were the realistic basis

for the theoretical construct. I didn't want anybody to say 'this is just a wild flight of your sick, twisted imagination.' So, I have all of it. I have the technological stuff and I have the... let us call them 'societal experiments.' I wanted people to believe that it was possible and, indeed, it is possible because in different ways we've already done it before. But if people decided to do it now, they could do it a lot more thoroughly."

"It is set in America rather than Canada for a very simple reason: Canada is 50% Catholic. In the States, there is a 17th-century Puritan tradition. If Canada is 17th-century at all, it is 17th-century French Catholic; or it is 19th-century English Protestant by which time those religious ideas were, essentially, things of the past: what you had was an influx of settlers many of whom were, in fact, Scottish and had a kind of Puritanism that was not the deeply-grounded, all-encompassing Puritanism that, in the States, saw the Church and State as being one and the same thing. When the machinery of the State becomes identified with the Church, that's when you run into difficulties. In the States, the New England seaboard was a 17th-century Puritan theocracy and remained one after the Restoration of Charles II. When the settlers arrived they thought they were the wave of the future; after the death of Cromwell, they became the wave of the past. The Salem witch trials were, partly, a reaction to the feeling of being cut off. That was the right ground for the kind of totalitarian theocracy I had in mind in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The seeds were there."

"The other reason I set the novel in the States is that I wanted someplace for my people to escape to. Historically, Canada has been the place where people in political trouble in the States go: it was the top of the Underground Railroad, and where the Vietnam draft-dodgers went (though not enough of them came to really change the fabric of society)."

"Canadians like to think that Americans are morally corrupt. But that's a piece of mythology: individual Americans are no more likely to be morally corrupt than individual Canadians. And the English are having a good stab at moral corruption themselves, these days. I think American foreign policy is more morally corrupt because they have a lot more scope, but I don't think that's due to some genetic difference. In other words, I think that if Canadians had a huge army and many foreign interests they would be just as morally corrupt. It's a question of power. The Americans see themselves as – and indeed are – more powerful than Canadians. Political cartoonists are constantly playing on that, I mean, they're constantly dressing our Prime Minister up in fluttery robes."

"Things were quite different during World War II. What happened during the war was that the Americans didn't come in until quite late. So, during the war, a lot of Americans were coming up to Canada to join the Royal Canadian Air Force because they wanted to be in the war and they couldn't get into it through their own country. But the war, in a way, was Canada's downfall because they lent a lot of money to Britain and committed a lot of resources and that created what was known as a capital vacuum: the money that came in to fill the capital vacuum came from the States.

"When I began writing in 1956 – having grown up in a literary milieu in which people couldn't get their books published, even in their own country, because they were too Canadian – I was not so much fighting men or Americans or any of those kinds of things as confronting the fact that no Canadian literature, with few exceptions, was taught in the schools; that you could not take a course in Canadian literature at University; and that, by and large, people, even Canadian people, weren't speaking of Canadian literature: if they spoke of it at all, they were dismissive. (Like some British literary critics today.) You were fighting to establish your own existence. And that was true for male writers as well as for female; it was true for everybody; and, for that reason, I think that male and female writers have stuck together more in Canada than they have in larger countries where they can afford to split, afford to be splinter groups. We couldn't really afford it and we still can't.

"I think I'm critical of ghettoes in general. Some men are never happier than when women are saying 'we'll go off and do our own thing.' Yet, if you go to literary readings a lot, you will find that the primary audience for everybody – men and women – is women. Except for science fiction. Men like science fiction quite a lot. Why can this be? I think it's because it has a theoretical base: you can solve problems with it. It has an algebraic base: A plus B must equal C plus D: it must all balance out or else it's bad science fiction. With sf, the rules are spelled out: this is a planet on which plants are sentient but they have no higher intelligence and this is what happens when you put some Earth people on it. What happens has, somehow, to be a logical extension of the premise. The same with utopias and dystopias: you establish the premises according to which the society is run and then you have to figure out how it got that way and whether or not it is plausible – whether it all fits – and what effects those structures would have on the people who are living in them. The *Hondmold's Tole* is very

popular with lawyers because they like societal blueprints that have a legalistic structure.

"I have a large number of people teaching my books for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes *The Hondmold's Tole* will be on a science-fiction course, sometimes it will be on a philosophy course, a theology course, a course devoted to utopias, a women's literature course: you name it. Sometimes it's on a Margaret Atwood course; there are such things. There's even a Margaret Atwood Society, in the States, and a newsletter. There's a group of academics for whom I'm a profession: they are the 'Margaret Atwood people': I'm what they study.

That's a kind of creepy feeling, like being a specimen. But I'm not responsible for who teaches my books or how they teach them: that's up to them. I'm sure that my work has been mis-read but I can't really afford to keep track of those who deal with it. I would be doing nothing else.

"*The Hondmold's Tole* has three endings but it has only those three: it doesn't have any ending you might choose. If people say, what advice do I have for avoiding this terrible future, I say: get rid of your credit cards. For once we all have credit cards..."

FOR SALE

The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction by David Pringle (with assistance from Ken Brown). Hard-cover edition, Grafton, 1990. A guide to some 3,000 sf titles, described by the *Oxford Times* as "among the four or five most useful books published in this field in the last two decades." It sold quite well and there are just a few copies left. We are selling these to IZ readers at less than half the original price of £16.95 – £8 inc. p & p (£10 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

Interzone: The 2nd Anthology. Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and others – fine tales which the *Times* described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to IZ readers at just over half the original cover price – £1.75 (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare. A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. Covers all Ballard's work from "The Violent Noon" in 1951 up to the eve of publication of *The Unlimited Dream Company* in 1979. Still in print in the USA but long hard to obtain in Britain. Now copies are available from Interzone at £3.50 each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

For any or all of these items please send a cheque or postal order for the appropriate amount to: Interzone, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. You may also pay by Access (MasterCard) or Visa card: please send us your card-holder's name, address, card expiry date and signature.

Testimony

William F. Temple

My first week in hospital – and the nights seemed endless.

Maybe that was because then I was still acting as though life itself were endless. The doctors were vague in their manner to me. Hopefully, I assumed they were vague and unsure about their diagnosis. But they didn't seem at all worried.

Why should I worry if they didn't?

Few of us are realists. Take a hard look at the world around us – all of it that you can see. Keep looking. Before long, if you're at least halfway human, you'll have to look away. The sheer amount of visible pain and unhappiness becomes more than you can bear to watch. So we kid ourselves and allow ourselves to be kidded.

Then one day it hits you right between your averted eyes.

As it did me in my second week in hospital.

The doubtful science of economics is shot through with fantasy. Yet underlying the gaseous theory is bedrock fact. Juggle with the figures all you like but in the end you can't buck them. Figures determine your life – and can terminate it.

Seven thousand is a nice round sum, a multiple of a lucky number. It's not so lucky for you, though, if it refers to pounds sterling when all you have in your bank account is a small fraction of that.

At that time £7,000 was the price of a haemodialysis unit, more loosely called a kidney machine. That nailed it as the price of life for people like me. Correction: plus running costs of around £1,000 per annum.

Thirty-five is also a multiple of lucky seven. Applied to years it may not seem so lucky to a left-on-the-shelf spinster. Hope must be running a bit low by then. It should be better for a man. Halfway through his three-score-and-ten, he should be on the point of emerging from self-centred and therefore unhappy adolescence, which runs later than you think. Some of the spontaneity of youth still remains, his prime lies ahead, his best is yet to be.

Unless he were me.

Thirty-five years are just a few too many. Age bars you from a free gift of one of those rare and precious kidney machines. Unless, maybe, you had a family to support. I hadn't. I'd left it too late.

Still, there are always tougher cases than one's own. I shouldn't grumble, although, being me, I did.

I had lost a kidney early in life but its mate had taken on double duty and stood the strain well through decades. This year, though, it seemed to be

getting tired. I'd been sent to hospital, I thought, so that it could have some kind of special rest treatment. It would recover. It was when they started probing my financial status instead of my body that the truth hit me.

My kidney was packing up altogether and me with it. My nights and days were numbered and the total wouldn't reach three figures.

As I say, I shouldn't grumble. I could have been 14 years old, like the lad two beds from me. Only twice seven years looked like being the total of Bob's life-span. He shared my troubles – medically, financially, and numerically. Age barred him too. He wasn't old enough to be a useful citizen or the head of a family. Nor was he rich. So, like myself, he wasn't quite important enough to save.

The difference between us was that I had had a run for my money, what money there had been. I had seen flying fishes play in the blue southern oceans, sunset reddening the Valley of Kings, Everest from Darjeeling, the towers of Manhattan, the misty glories of the Western Isles...

And, ironically, Naples.

Young Bob had never been further from London than Bognor Regis.

I had had more women than I had fingers and toes. I'd kept the fingers and toes but none of the women, which was just as well, as it had turned out now. Bob was not precocious. I doubted that he'd had even as much as a kiss and a cuddle from anyone but his mother.

I had learned to treasure Shakespeare. Bob hadn't overcome the schoolboy's inoculation against him. Great music had sustained my soul. Bob hadn't progressed beyond tribal chants and the rattle of sticks and drums.

He didn't know what he was losing. Maybe he never would have gone on to discover much of it, anyway. But I knew what I was saying goodbye to. You don't appreciate the full value of things until you start losing them – and the future is sans eyes, sans ears, sans teeth, sans every damn thing.

I tried to look my last on all things lovely every hour. Not too easy in this particular ward which, I had come to realize, was the last caravanserai for incurables. All the same, there were some lovely characters there, especially among the nurses. It seemed wrong that they should be spending their working lives on the banks of the Styx. Yet I never heard them complain. They buttressed one's belief in

human beings, as their inadequate wages soured one's belief in social justice.

For the rest of us except the devout, the crazy, and the past caring, Death cast his shadow over all things. Colours look pretty dim in shadow.

Everybody brought us flowers to cheer us up. To a healthy eye, which could well see Sloane Square again, the ward sometimes looked like a marquee at the Chelsea Flower Show. My unhealthy eye saw them as floral tributes come before their time – or saw beyond them to the crematoria from which some of them may have come after their time.

I preferred to regard the bowl of bananas on my bedside cabinet. The associations seemed warmer. They were a cheerful yellow bespeckled with black sin – bent, asymmetrical, shaped by the haphazard pressures of their own bunch. You could hardly imagine them growing in God's perfect garden.

Not that I had anything against heaven. I liked what I could see of it from my bed. The windows were tall and the slices of sky therefore generous.

I saw more of the night sky than of the day. My day was a series of increasingly frequent dozes beginning to merge on the way to a diabetic coma. In the waking intervals I watched the clouds on the sky-blue ocean slowly changing their coast-lines: all those bays and capes and river deltas in a state of continuous recreation. But I saw them more often illumined from behind by the moon.

Some nights the sky was cloudless and moonless. Then, and only then, came occasionally the feeling that possibly life was more than a pointless happening. Lying there staring at the circling planets and the so-called fixed constellations, the prodigious gem-scatter of the Milky Way and the tiny, hazy glows of galaxies mind-shaking distances away, I lost all sense of self and with it my damning self-pity. I was an integral part of all that and inseparable from it. I wasn't destined to be cut off in my prime. I wasn't going to be cut off at all.

Queens have died young and fair but the tragedy was illusory. Millions of young soldiers died in the war that has always been going on somewhere, but their souls went marching on – in another form, on another level, somewhere in this space-time continuum.

Disillusionment, if that's what it was, would come with the dawn, though. Against a nearing clatter of breakfast crockery, real and hard, the dream-dozes would enshroud me again. Everything was dream-stuff, anyway, though there were too many nightmares for comfort, and total oblivion might be preferable to the bumpy wheel of life. There was no strain in oblivion.

There were no stars and no ethereality the night the Healer came. The clouds weren't making any fanciful maps. Indeed, there was only one cloud: an amorphous mass had fallen from that heaven, sagging over the roof of this old hospital and weeping its remorse straight on to the slate tiles. It, anyway, was changing its form and level, and the gutters overflowed trying to cope with it.

The windows were no more than streaming black oblongs. No view, no promise.

I felt definitely out of tune with the Infinite.



Illustrations by Tony Roberts

But the Infinite came in out of that wet darkness, into this dim-lit place where all the lights were dying, to us, to me.

Past the night-nurse, writing in her window-walled cubicle by the door. To pause for a moment beside the first bed, in the far corner from me, and touch the sleeping occupant. I never knew the name of the occupant nor what he suffered from apart from senile decay. To me he was just the Old Man Who Fell Out of Bed. He fell out at least once a night, never seemed to hurt himself, and was always apologetic to the nurse who helped him back.

The Infinite, just a shadow in the shadows at that distance, passed to the next bed.

I raised myself on to one elbow, trying to make out what was going on. The other insomniac in this ward, Peters, had made it that bit more difficult. Night illumination here was supplied by low-wattage lamps under frosted glass panels in the floor, so that no light shone directly into our eyes. But Peters complained that it kept him awake. He covered the panels with single sheets of newspaper, further diffusing the glow. The matron asked if anyone objected. No one thought it worth making an issue about. So Peters was tolerated. It was a tolerantly run hospital and they were particularly tolerant to us in this ward. They didn't plague us with fussy rules, they recognized our humanity, maybe the more so because it was ebbing.

The Infinite, moving quickly but quietly from bed to bed, was halfway down the ward before I could discern that it was in the shape of a hatless man in a dripping raincoat which was rain-darkened from grey nearly to black.

Clearly an intruder, not a doctor.

I called out: "Who's that? What are you doing there?"

The Infinite replied in a low but angry voice: "Shut up and mind your own bloody business."

And moved on to the next bed.

He hadn't awakened anyone he'd touched, so far as I could see. But then, he might have cut their throats, so little could I see.

His anger sparked mine. I felt more anger than fear, and it was directed more at the staff than at him. Their tolerance had become slackness and let a lunatic loose among us.

I opened my mouth to call the night nurse, then shut it. She had heard my challenge to the lunatic and was on her way with trained briskness. Nurse Doyle, a petite colleen bawn.

The stranger was at Dave Young's bed, opposite mine, when she caught up with him, so I heard her whisper quite clearly.

"Don't disturb the patients, please, sir. Come along to my office and tell me what 'tis you're wanting."

The stranger answered, also in a whisper but a fierce one.

"Leave me alone. I know what I'm doing."

"And what, pray, are you doing?"

"Snatching their unbelieving and therefore damned souls from hellfire, in your particular view, no doubt." More than sarcasm, it was nearer to hatred. "Go back and finish your love letter to Paddy, my girl, if you want to help your patients. I'm not harming them. I'm healing them."

"What? Now that will be quite enough of that, who-

ever you are. If you don't leave at once, I'll fetch the doctor on duty. And the porters."

"Oh, go to hell, woman."

He pushed her aside impatiently and bent over Dave, who had been awakened by these exchanges and was just raising his head. The stranger put the heel of his palm against Dave's forehead and, not ungentily, pressed him back on to the pillow.

Dave lay very still. Still as death? His heart was in a condition where almost any kind of shock could stop it.

Nurse Doyle seized the stranger's arm and tried to pull him away. Deliberately, sadiistically, he bent her fingers back until I heard the joints crack. Her slight, small body went taut with agony but she made no sound.

That was when I, weak as I was, forced myself out of bed.

The stranger released her fingers. She turned to escape. I had never seen a nurse run but I expected to do so now. I was wrong. She saw me, hesitated, then came across to me unsteadily. Her feet scuffed the paper away from a floor light and suddenly her pretty face was lit from below. I caught the fear in her eyes. I had the measure of Nurse Doyle and knew it wasn't fear for herself but for her charges.

Disciplined habits resumed control. She became impersonal again.

"Back into bed, Mr Hall, please. You're not to get up yet."

The professional white-lie code: make them think there's always hope, that one day they'll be up and around again. Meanwhile, rest and be a patient patient.

"But -"

"No buts." She helped me back, tucked me in, trying not to hurry. But her wrenched fingers were shaking. Then she went off up the ward, still trying not to hurry. But the click-click-click of her heels on the parquet floor was faster than brisk.

The stranger stared after her. Suddenly I was afraid he might follow and attack her. To pull his attention away, I said loudly: "Can you really heal people?"

He looked my way, silently. Then all at once he came striding across. The upflung light momentarily revealed the face of a devil. I was reminded of a performance of Faust in which Mephistopheles was lit only by a low-level spotlight, a theatrical trick which makes even unexceptional faces appear sinister.

And this was no ordinary face. The devil in it was no mere surface illusion of light and shade.

He stood over me, tall, gaunt, majestic in his strange wrath. His hair was black, sleek, wet as that of a drowned man. His frown was beaded with rain-water. His chin jutted, square and sharp as a chisel's edge. His nose was high-bridged, almost a beak. Disappointment lines ran from it to the corners of his mouth, which was contemptuous, snarling. Yet it was a sensitive, full-lipped mouth.

He had been around for quite a while but I couldn't be sure of guessing his age within a decade.

He stared at the number above my bed. Then he regarded me with, I thought, increased fury.

"What are you doing in that bed?"

"Dying - that's if you have no objection."

"None at all. Get on with it," he snapped. He turned as if to go, then abruptly wheeled back. "You're privileged, my friend – do you know that? You die in a hallowed place."

"Well... that's nice to know."

"My son died in that bed. He was only a boy."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"How could you be sorry?" he challenged. "You didn't know him."

"I'm sorry, anyway. Just as I'm sorry for Bob there. That boy... two beds along. He's only fourteen and he's dying too."

The stranger looked sharply across at the small still shape under the bedclothes.

"I couldn't save my son. Why should I save that boy? He's nothing to me, any more than you are."

Suddenly I was weary of his unprovoked aggressiveness. What a way to squander energy – that precious life-energy! I was truly sorry about the loss of his son, but –

"What the hell's eating you?" I asked, irritably.

"What's your grudge against people?"

"Simply that they exist, damn them, they exist. Do you want to go on existing?"

"Yes – but hardly like this."

"I can change that. I can make you as hale a man as ever you were."

"I doubt it."

"Doubt won't save you. I condemn you to life."

He bent towards me, extending a hand. His face, at close quarters, quite awed me. I seemed to look beyond his eyes into a riven soul. There was despair behind the hate, agony behind the contempt. His psyche was blasted by an emotional storm fierce enough to drive him out of his mind.

I could feel the electrical disturbance, the stress and distress, affecting my own mind.

Emotion at such extreme pitch can break through to some other plane where the body's laws – and, indeed, some natural laws – are irrelevant. The berserk warrior feels no wounds. The martyr glories in the fire. The visionary sees God in His firmament. The prophet pierces the veil hiding the future. The medium demonstrates psycho-kinesis. And the spiritual healer performs miracles.

I knew with sudden certainty that the force possessing this man could heal me.

I knocked his arm aside. "Not me. The boy. Go to the boy."

My mind was whirling in confusion but I held on to that thought.

The stranger glowered at me.

"Who the devil do you think you are – Sir Philip Sidney? His need is greater than thine and all that balls?"

"Go to Bob," I said, faintly.

"Damn you for a fool. You and that silly little nurse. Your sort defeat your own ends. You drain the spirit from me... It's going. Here, before it's too late."

He clapped his hand to my forehead. Sudden intense heat and blinding light. It was like having an exploding atom bomb all to myself. Maybe a man struck by lightning experiences much the same.

After that – nothing. No light, no sound, no stranger, no hospital, no Rodney Hall.



But they all – except the stranger – returned, as the sunlight returned, in the morning. All clear and sharp, unclouded by poisonous waste residues in my brain and bloodstream.

It was as though I had been born again.

Dave Young, complying with hospital regulations, had included a bathrobe among the necessities he brought with him. But it was never a true necessity. His valvular condition was too serious for him to be allowed to set a foot out of bed.

It was a new bathrobe, a shining light blue. He was wearing it now, for the first time. His eyes shone as brightly as it did. He was on the visitor's chair at my bedside watching my face eagerly.

I focused on him.

"Rod, wake up, blast you," he said. "You would be almost the last, wouldn't you? How are you feeling? You look fine."

I sat up without the usual struggle to do so. I felt energetic, enterprising, and hungry. Lord, that forgotten feeling: a raring to go!

"I feel fine. I feel bloody wonderful. What's happened? And you, Dave – they've let you get up? What goes on?"

The ward was alive and buzzing. Excited people were moving around or standing in small groups, talking, talking. It was like a cocktail party except that tea was the only drink going; and that, despite their excitement, most of the people were keeping their voices down. They couldn't believe their own luck. They felt almost guilty about it. For many of the mortally sick were still with us, their unhappiness accentuated by the realization that they were the unchosen, the still doomed.

Dave said: "It's unbelievable, Rod. Some of us have been cured overnight. Restored – completely restored, I mean. A miracle's happened here, man, a bloody miracle."

Then I remembered.

"Someone came in the night," Dave went on. "Nobody knows who he was. He slipped past the reception office without being seen. But Nurse Doyle saw him. She spoke to him. So did you, she says."

"Yes, that's right. My God, it's true: he was a healer."

"Who was he? Did he say?"

"No, Dave, he didn't. I've never seen his face before but I'll never forget it."

Some of the others noticed that I was awake now. They came crowding round my bed, watching, waiting for me to speak again. Among them was the Old Man Who Fell Out of Bed. He still looked old but nothing like so decrepit. He was erect, his eyes were alert, his body had lost its tremors. He must have suffered something worse than just senility, else he would have been in the geriatric ward. But now, clearly, nothing ailed him.

He addressed me in the calm, round-vowelled accents of Eton and Cambridge. "In whatever guise He appeared, He was our Lord, I'm sure of that. I envy you, sir. You were privileged to witness the Second Coming."

I said, wryly: "I'm sorry but I can't really credit that. He wasn't remotely like the Christ of the Testaments – apart from one thing: he was a man who had suffered a great deal. But not meekly and patiently, as the Lord

did. He was far from gentle and his language was far from mild. I don't think he loved anyone, let alone everyone."

"That may well have been your personal impression of him," said the Old Man. "Perhaps mine, too, had I encountered him. But don't forget that you – and I – were ill then, and confused. Sickness does so cloud the mind. Speaking for myself, at least, I've had some difficulty of late communicating with my fellow men with any clarity. I just couldn't make out what they were saying. But the Lord has restored me. I am whole again. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

"Amen," said Peters. His voice was quiet and sincere, lacking its usual querulous note. He was relaxed and at peace. I realized that the cross-grainedness had been a symptom of his illness.

"How about Bob?" I asked suddenly. "Did he do anything for young Bob?"

"We're not sure yet," said Dave. "The pair of you just went on sleeping, Bob's still asleep. Nurse Doyle's with him."

I swung my legs out of bed and dug in my locker for my dressing gown. It was crumpled under books and papers, sugarless chocolate and other accumulated litter. I had had shrinking hopes of ever wearing it again.

The others began to drift to Bob's bed. I joined them.

Bob lay on his back, eyes closed, arms resting on the counterpane. He was so still that I feared he was in a coma. Nurse Doyle was taking his pulse, eyes on her wristwatch. Dr Payne stood at the other side of the bed, watching. He was trying to maintain his persona of a completely inscrutable man but the bafflement showed through.

"Still normal," said Nurse Doyle. "And strong."

Dr Payne nodded curtly, as though this were exactly what he had expected to hear.

I saw Bob's eyelashes move. There was a touch of colour in his cheeks which I had never seen there before. I knew then that it was going to be all right. The healer's hand had not lost its power before it reached him.

Bob opened his eyes.

To me it was like the sudden swinging open of great gates which we had seen shutting in our faces. It was a renewal of the broken promise of life. I was overcome. There was a strange aural delusion of heralding trumpets and men's deep, rich voices singing a psalm of thanks-giving.

I wanted to speak to Bob. I wanted to ask Nurse Doyle what had become of the healer. I could say nothing at all. I turned away as the weak and embarrassing tears came.

After that, the inquisitive, matter-of-fact people: the newspaper reporters and the TV interviewers. Then the check-ups, the X-ray sessions, the visits by leading specialists. And then, at last, release into the living world beyond the hospital walls.

The Miracle of Ramsden Hospital is remembered particularly because it was the first of its kind. Also because of the mystery surrounding the Healer (the capital was bestowed by the popular press) in those early days. He had vanished back into that midnight rainstorm as anonymously as he had emerged from it.

By the time Nurse Doyle had located a porter and returned with him, the Healer had gone. She hadn't been absent all that long: they had missed him only narrowly. She wondered why they hadn't encountered him leaving through those long corridors. She seemed half inclined to believe that he had dematerialized, like a spirit. On the other hand, she jibbed at accepting the existence of a spirit so disrespectful to her Church. The Healer, from that aspect, was altogether too earthy.

Like all the others, she asked me for my impression of him.

I said: "Well, what struck me most was his obvious unhappiness. He seemed divided against himself: in the throes of some wild mental or spiritual conflict. I'd say he was on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown. He was consumed by hatred and resentment. Something must have hurt him really badly. And yet, despite that, he did what he did. He helped, he cured – as far as he was able to. Something possessed him – I don't understand what."

"Oh, dear, what a pity," she said. "That poor man was in need of treatment himself. Oh, it's a shame, it is, that I tried to have him thrown out. I didn't realize what he was doing. If only I hadn't interfered 'tis possible the other poor souls in the ward might have been healed too. It was God's work I tried to stop."

"You can't blame yourself for that, Nurse. It was the way he went about it. He behaved so strangely that I thought he was crazy, too – and in a sense he was, of course."

"I wonder if they'll ever trace him."

"Small chance if last night was just an isolated incident. They've so little to go on. No one but you and I, Nurse, properly saw him. But if he goes on behaving like that, he's bound to be caught in the end. In a way, I hope he will be discovered. I'd like a chance to see him again and thank him for saving my life."

But I never did see the Healer again – not in the flesh, that is. So I've chosen to express my thanks in writing, in this form. I'm only one of so many, of course, who have similar cause to thank him. Only those who have actually entered the Valley of the Shadow of Death, all hope gone, can know what it means to feel a rescuing hand pluck them back into the sunlight. I've tried to convey something of what it was like for me, though my inadequate talent fails to bridge the gap between experience and description. But at least I've made this effort.

Many have blessed the Healer. Some have hated him. Some have vilified him cynically. Some have even called him a fake, which, in the face of the indisputable evidence labels them as fools.

Some feared him superstitiously, believing he was in league with the Devil. In one sense, they weren't so far wrong.

My own belief is that the Healer, like the rest of us, was neither wholly good nor wholly bad, not superhuman but all too human. His only significant failing was his inability to accept that. He set his standards impossibly high, for himself and for all of us. Thus he created his own agony.

But let it be remembered that through his suffering the pain of multitudes was eased. And somewhere deep in that distorted nature he must have felt that this was a good thing.

For I hold and testify that basically he was a man of good will. Had there been more of that breed in this power-greedy world, especially on the influential levels where they are particularly scarce, he would never have been driven into his lonely personal hell.

And I should not have lived to write this.

William F. Temple (1914-1989) was a highly regarded veteran of British sf, author of such novels as *The Four-Sided Triangle* (1949), *Shoot at the Moon* (1966) and *The Fleshpots of Sansato* (1968). For further details of his career, see Mike Ashley's recently published tribute to him in *Foundation* 55, Summer 1992. The above piece was found among Bill Temple's papers after his death. It was intended as the "overture" to an unwritten novel which would have been called *The Healer*. We are grateful to Mike Ashley for bringing it to our attention, and to Joan Temple for permission to publish it here for the first time.

Kim Stanley Robinson's

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Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

Coming your way soon on straight-to-video:

Head Cold: The world's first frozen-head gonzo comedy futuristic chase thriller. Nerdy software author Victor Tesco joins a Valley cryo-revivalist cult to try and lose his virginity, only to find himself killed in a moped smash on the way home and resurrected in the year 2292 in error for a tough LA cop shot dead in the line of duty, with orders to track down a 20th-century psycho whose head has been mistakenly preserved and transplanted on to an invincible cyborg body. Now the luckless Vic has two choices: he can admit to the mixup and have his newly-reanimated head tossed back in the trash – or he can button up and go after the psycho in his own, incongruously well-endowed new body! 87 minutes including trailers.

Fear the Reaper: When a small Idaho community is hit by a series of mysterious disappearances at the same time as an outbreak of crop circles, only vacationing physicist Dr Martin Pye suspects that the circles are caused by time vortices bringing bounty hunters from the future to carry off attractive 20th-century teenagers to breed with the few remaining fertile humans in a world without ozone or rainforests. It's truly a "race against time" as the brainy Dr Pye rigs his tractor with a home-built vortex generator to enable him to follow the kidnappers of his farmgirl sweetheart Lori back to their sinister future world. But with the mowers already moving in on the summer's crop, can Martin rescue Lori before his link to his own time is severed forever under the pitiless blades of the combine harvester? Don't miss the nail-biting false ending to this great romantic action fantasy thriller that marries the fast-paced energy and excitement of *Field of Dreams* with the moving adult drama of *Back to the Future*.

Faxing the Runes: This zany updated remake of *Night of the Demon* will have M.R. James writhing in his grave – with laughter! Ruthless yuppie trader Max Rappaport is a man who seems to have everything but a heart – till the day he tangles with an old gypsy parchment that will bring doom on him in 48 hours, unless Max can trick one of his enemies into accepting the

document from him and so drawing the curse on themselves instead. But in the information age, document transfer turns out to be a more complicated business than Max has bargained for...A hilariously scary satire that guarantees e-mail will never seem the same again.

Alien Goes Forth: Uh, it's set on a planet, or a ship, no, wait, maybe a space station, and the alien uh gets aboard somehow and uh eats some guys and Sigourney gets sent in, hm, no, I guess ok, how about the Company do an android of Sigourney like the Lance Henriksen deal in the last one, and they send the droid into kill it, only maybe she doesn't know she's a droid, right, and uh there's a big ending and the alien loses, no, wins, whatever. OK, type that up and clip an invoice to Fox for two point five mil and a story/xprod credit, and say if Sigourney won't sign settle for Kristy Swanson. Uh, could someone hold my hands steady to light this cigarette?

And so, one more of the great icons of modern sf cinema finally takes the big dive into the obligatory vat of boiling ore, not with a thunderous Dolby stereo bang but with a long deconstipated sigh of merciful release. *Alien³* is, I suppose, the future of top-budget filmmaking, where everyone is responsible and nobody is in control, and where the heavens resound with hallelujahs if the whole wounded white elephant can stay standing a weekend or two to recover its costs before Mr Word-of-Mouth tells the world not to bother. Without picking over yet again the byzantine production history of this highly-publicized lesson in cinematic self-immolation, three clear points can be spotted by anyone with a pair of eyes and the price of a ticket. First, this is a script that has been rewritten so many times that the narrative glue holding set pieces together has lost all sticking power it once may have had, and nothing on earth could have turned it into a truly worthy successor to the series. It's not just that, eg, the "some kind of millenarian Christian fundamentalist" cult left over from the Vincent Ward draft has no meaning or function whatever left in the screen

version, and is happily forgotten except when required for a scene *ad hoc*; or that the very first thing every punter opines on the way out past the hot dogs is that the ending comes out a total clone of *Terminator 2*. It's more the basics: one would have thought that of all people the once-marvellous Walter Hill, who seems to have been replaced by an android around 1980, would have grasped that it's very very difficult to do plots that depend on the topology of enclosed space without regular, clear, and repeated screen reference to maps and diagrams with little arrows. ("I have a problem with this." "Which part?" "The part where we're running around in a fucking maze with that thing chasing us." Perils of dictation – all kinds of indiscreet rewrite-room chitchat can wind up copied down faithfully into the script.)

Second, the many quite good things about the finished (if that's the word) scenario are mostly the product of accident or necessity rather than design, with a lot of the stuff claimed as "bold," "downbeat," "different," "dark," or "unexpected" – wiping out the survivors of movie 2 before the credits are done, offing the series lead, sticking the strongest supporting players at the top of the kill stack – plainly the result of forced circumstance rather than deliberate planning-that-way. I don't suppose even the inspired setting, a prison planet for the irredeemably camp, was exactly part of anyone's original concept, though given (a) the decision to film in Pinewood and (b) the requirement for the players to be distinctive enough to tell apart with their heads shaved, the solution of peopling the entire cast with outrageous Brit character actors calling one another wanker was a happy if egregious stroke of the inevitable. (There are drawbacks, of course: characters that threaten to walk off with too much of the picture have to get peremptorily schlugged from overhead, and it takes a long time to recover from the terrible sense of the film's being suddenly over when Charles Dance and Brian Glover both cop it in such quick and early succession.) By contrast, the film's probably at its least persuasive when it thinks it does have an interesting idea,

with both the woman-as-alien conceit and the self-conscious AIDS metaphors coming over as insistently lame, meretricious, and laboured. (As an exercise in practical criticism, compare the climactic image of *Alien*³ with this excerpt from J.D. Ratcliff, *Birth* (Dodd, Mead & Co. 1951): "In one series of experiments, research men plunged monkeys in labour into baths of liquid air. They were frozen rock hard almost instantaneously. Examination of sections of the uteri gave a clear picture of events taking place." Which scene would you rate more disturbing, and why? Which cost more to make?)

And third and ultimately, this is still probably the best film that could possibly have been made from the materials made available, thanks almost entirely to defiant hard work by a remarkable amount of frontline talent that has somehow managed to remain unsacked to the end. The first half-hour is good and often excellent, and – after a draggy and disappointing hour-long Domestos ad in the middle – the final half-hour is at least acceptably pacy and involving, for all its overstretched suspense and fearfully formulaic plotting. As director, David Pincher does entirely honorable work, given that his brief is pretty much confined to defining the visual texture of other people's labour; while Weaver completes her remarkable work on the Ripley character (still a benchmark screen heroine for the times, as well as the only role the actress has yet found that really shows off her stuff) in courageous defiance of some frankly shabby writing and often perfunctory motivation. It's certainly not any of these people's fault that they have to compete with the second movie rather than the first (to which this really wouldn't have looked too bad a followup); the bleaker aspects of the Cameronized version have been faithfully and laudably developed; and the original, junked William Gibson draft at least financed a compensatingly fabulous novel. But it's still a state-of-the-art shambles, and it'll be a long time before anyone again has the temerity to attempt a head-on sequel to a Cameron sequel.

It's striking, in fact, how pretty much all the big stuff in the summer of '92 (including the *Batman* and *Lethal Weapon* movies) seemed condemned to dance with the ghost of *Terminator 2*. And of all these wouldbes by far the most upfront, unembarrassed, and unashamedly daft has to be **Universal Soldier** – with its irresistibly cutprice recourse to Dolph Lundgren v Jean-Claude Van Damme as a budgetable substitute for the unaffordable, and its otherwise pricelessly straight-to-sellthrough concept of what really happened to all those pesky MiAs from Nam that gave poor old George such a



Sigourney Weaver and Charles S. Dutton in 'Alien³'

rough ride on the campaign trail. (Give up? they all got put on ice by the Pentagon for reasons blissfully unexplained, to be eventually reprogrammed in the nineties as elite and untraceable gene-doctored warriors in the crusade against terrorism, drugs, and all similarly-pressing world problems that can be sorted out by a SWAT team of *Soldier of Fortune* pinups who shoot up on spinach and knock down walls with their heads.)

It's a film that revels in the freedom that comes with sloughing off all shame or artistic ambition – that thinks nothing of inventing a brazen side-effect to the programming that explicitly triggers reversion to a single character trait, or casting a pair of heavy-accented Europeans as those ultimate Americans, the boys who bought the paddyfield in '69. ("Are you from France or Canada or somewhere?" asks the heroine of cute but oddly-vowelled Van Damme before they settle on Louisiana. "My name," Lundgren introduces himself in turn with much less attempt at fabricating an excuse," is Särjent Andrew Scøtt.")

No expense has been spared on the location permits, but everything else, including the acting, has been piled as high as it goes and sold as cheap – there's even a bargain two separate publicity tags, one of which ("The Future Has a Bad Attitude") has presumably been thrown in free at a discount as it has nothing whatever to do with the film (which happily announces its setting as "Present Day").

If this all sounds as though rental premiere beckons with a siren irresistibility, think again. Granted, *Universal Soldier* is a high-concept, low-forehead romp with all the style and flair of a points failure at Clapham. But, it does have a feature-length chase between two unstoppable assassins tossing one another through walls over the fate of defenceless innocents, lots of totally keen big-truck action, and a huge thewy star with a teutonic accent you could cut with a rolled-up newspaper. And that, in 1992, is precisely the stuff that rings the bells. Welcome to the Odeon Leicester Square.

(Nick Lowe)

Tube Corn

Wendy Bradley

This column is late. Sorry about that. I'll get my breath back in a minute. It's not just from the usual urgent need to sort the contents of my freezer into alphabetical order or iron the tea towels (I follow the V.I. Warshawski school of housekeeping – don't bother unless you need something to do to avoid doing something else – and my place is never so clean as when I ought to be writing instead). It's not even from the more urgent need to balance my pencil on the end of my nose and print out the test pattern on my printer just to make sure it's still working (Bel Elton describes this as "the stuff you do before you do the stuff to do"). No, the reason this piece is really, really, late is that I can't bear to think about it. I'm sorry, but I look at the words **Virtual Murder** and my brain goes blank. In fact I have just had a cosmic insight: this is obviously what

happened to the cast and crew to make the thing so unwatchable in the first place. I postulate a lethal brain virus from Betelgeuse that was cunningly inserted into the first script to soften us up for the Invasion of the Green Things but which failed in its intent because we all became too brain-blank to remember to watch it to render ourselves brain-blank.

Well, all right, let's try and keep our brains intact by sneaking up on it. Let's go via the "what on earth has happened to the BBC drama output?" route. Tell me, what is wrong with *House of Elliot*, *Trainer* and of course (although a different department) *Eldorado*? No, "they're all crap" isn't the answer I'm looking for, thank you. Each one sounds as though it ought to work. *House of Elliot*: doughty unprotected females moving through 1920s and 30s high society – sex, aristocracy and fab

costumes. *Trainer*: sweating horse-flesh and skullduggery – sex, rich bastards and animal magnetism. *Eldorado*: the infamous (or should that be un-famous?) "sun, sex and sangria." But what we are actually served up with is sunshine and bad sound quality from *Eldorado*, galloping horses and galloping tedium from *Trainer* and a covetable line in those hats that look like a squashed upside-down bucket in *The House of Elliot*.

Now we all know how *Virtual Murder* should have worked: it was designed to be an *Avengers* for the 90s with snappy male/female repartee, some groovy costumes and wacky villains and an offbeat sense of humour. Oh sure, I can pitch *Virtual Murder* to you, I just can't watch it. No doubt they pitched it in this vein to all the famous people guesting on it: how else would you get Baldrick to play Father Christmas and then box Hywel Bennett? But they pitched it about as realistically as they pitched the movie within the movie in *The Player* or indeed as realistically as *House of Elliot*, *Trainer* and *Eldorado*. In each case the plausible package just doesn't work.

My theory is that a lot of it is to do with the acting. Nicholas Clay as Dr John Cornelius and Kim Thomson as Samantha Valentine are both pretty enough but I can't bear to listen to either of them speak. Kim Thomson especially sounds as though someone is holding a gun on her off-camera and forcing her to read the script off idiot boards. In fact now I come to think of it, the leads in *House of Elliot* and *Trainer* also sound as though they have learned upper-class RP accents at gun-point. Does no-one learn to speak at drama schools these days? A certain eccentricity of dialect can be endearing – as when Rutger Hauer bashes his head through the bathroom wall to give Harrison Ford his David Bowie impression in *Blade Runner* – but if Mel Gibson can play *Hamlet* without making me laugh then surely English actors should be able to portray the English upper classes without that false note creeping in?

And, my goodness, the special effects. *Trainer* and *House of Elliot* have at least been carefully polished with money; *Eldorado* and *Virtual Murder* rub with reality where they ought to soothe with syrup. Can you forget the awfulness of the train in episode two, "Last Train to Hell and Back"? A steam train going through a tunnel and sparking off the track was the aim: it should have been wreathed in smoke and romance and lit by sparkle and magic. It actually looked as though someone had glued a lot of sparklers to the bottom of the engine. A piece of cannibalized footage from, say, *Fortunes of War* would have cost less and looked more.

Kim Thomson and Nicholas Clay in 'Virtual Murder'



The thing is, I couldn't work out what level of reality they were pitching for all along – Cornelius' university is devoid of money problems, office politics, a location and, of course, students; and his sidekick Valentine hangs in the air in her perfect little suits with not a hair out of place, supported only by the writers' and producers' fantasies. This is not "virtual" murder – yes, I know the last episode had some virtual-reality gizmos in it to give at least a tenuous justification for the series' title – it is just plain murder, pure and simple, to watch. Because of this it was also, of course, a hoot and, yes, I did watch every episode, deciding in the end that to be brain-blanked on a Friday night after a hard week's work wasn't that bad. Of course we all know it is going to run and run in samizdat tapes and fanzines in the dealers rooms of conventions. We are so starved for programmes even marginally in the sf and fantasy genres that I have no doubt the fan club is forming even as I write. After all, even *Sapphire and Steel* has its adherents. Just think how much money a TV company could make that comes up with a good genre programme.

Is anyone out there listening?

Hello?

Hello?

(Wendy Bradley)

Interaction

Continued from page 5

that opinion from a slightly different angle. My reason for doing this is your comment in *IZ* 60 about the Horror fraternity having their tastes catered for in their own magazines... But are they? I suppose the answer is yes if your idea of Horror fans are those who sit with bated breath waiting for news of the latest video nasty or a review of the most recent slash-and-gore movie. If you are an aficionado of such scuzzy films then no doubt you relish reading articles on how the special effects were achieved and lap up interviews with the actors and actresses who star in these productions.

But there is no horror magazine (as opposed to fanzines or yearly-produced book anthologies) of which I am aware, that caters for horror buffs on an intellectual level. By that I mean the editors of Horror magazines seem to think their readers are incapable of following a story, because those I've subscribed to in the past publish no fiction. Yes, I know *Fear* did but that magazine is no longer with us and even when it was in production its fiction element was only a small fraction of its format because, it seems to me, it was aimed at a very narrow sphere of the market (16-to-25 year old film goers) rather than the wider audience which *Interzone* aims at.

So what am I trying to say? Don't cut

off your nose to spite your face? Well, perhaps not quite as strong as that. What I am trying to point out is there has to be a large untapped market for a magazine that caters for those who (in common with the sf & fantasy readers of *IZ*) like their Horror in its nascent form – fiction.

I'm certainly not suggesting you scrap the idea of a fantasy magazine in favour of another genre – from the responses you've had there is obviously a call for one – but are we horror fans still to be left sitting on that very uncomfortable fence between sf and fantasy, especially when a large number of us enjoy a dip into either of those two categories?

What all this beating about the proverbial bush is coming to is why are we being excluded from both camps? You say that in the present economic climate a sister magazine for *IZ* is out of the question, but when it does become more temperate would it not be more conducive to the magazine's financial success if fictional horror (including book reviews) was given a place in it, and turn *IZ* into an exclusively sf product? Alternatively why not extend the existing magazine so that it regularly covers fantasy and horror instead of just the occasional dabble? In the meantime keep up the good work of putting fiction, whatever "weird" category it fits, to the forefront.

Lindsey Russell

Dorking, Surrey

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If you can afford to do so, why not consider supporting this magazine by taking out a very long-term subscription? (We define a "lifetime sub" as one which lasts either the lifetime of the subscriber or the lifetime of the magazine.)

We have already been going for ten years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly to monthly publication, so early "lifetimers" bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £260 (UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S. accelerated surface mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

JGB NEWS

A newsletter for readers of J.G. Ballard

Yes, the Ballard newsletter has been revived, after several years away. Full of specialist bibliographical information and minutiae, it is for keen readers of JGB only.

Issue 18 is out now, accompanied by the never-circulated issue 17. If you wish to receive them, please send £2 (inland) or £3 (overseas; \$4 USA – dollar bills accepted). Make cheques or postal orders payable to "David Pringle" and send them to *Interzone*'s main address, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK.

I am willing to trade the newsletter for cuttings, photocopies, etc., of reviews, interviews and articles concerning JGB (especially overseas material). Please enquire if you have a genuine interest.

Little Stevie

Sally Darnowsky

The home pregnancy test had come out negative, so Eloise had gone to her gynaecologist. He picked up a second heartbeat that sounded like a pony cantering through surf, but when the lab reported that she wasn't pregnant he wanted to bung her: to stick a hollow needle into her solid round abdomen, solid as a ripe honeydew, with little silver lines radiating out from her navel like the stretching of the rind, and her navel like the place where the melon broke off from the stem.

She didn't go back, didn't return the calls from his office – "Are you refusing treatment? Will you sign a waiver?" It got so bad that she stopped answering her telephone, unplugged the jack from the wall and put the phone away in the cupboard over the stove on top of the Christmas-tree plate her sister had given her eight years before when it looked like Kevin would settle down and they could start a family. But Kevin had gone off to Winnipeg on a three-week contract and stayed there and here she was, spread out in the three-bedroom duplex they'd bought in 1982 when the concrete complex was making headlines in *Architectural Digest*.

Of course the pregnancy tests hadn't shown up positive: Eloise hadn't had sex since that time with the young Thai programmer, the one who set up the datacom between her PC and the mainframe downtown. He was in and out in three minutes and forty seconds but kept her coming with his left hand until nearly two in the morning, which was when he stepped under the shower, stepped out of the shower into his jeans and out the door while she struggled to sit up in bed.

Still, there was her solid round abdomen, solid as a honeydew, too small when compared to the beer-barrel pregnancies she remembered from her mother – five kids in eleven years and nine residual pounds per kid – but it didn't matter, she'd learned by now to never again try to compete with her mother. She had her PC and her direct hook-up to the mainframe and earned more money in two months than her father had in a year, and him with six mouths to feed. She had one, now maybe one and a half; she fantasized that maybe the Thai had learned some ancient laman sperm-slowness method developed when men weren't sure they'd make it back home through the snow of the Himalayan passes. Though she'd heard in Thailand it was the women who had many husbands, sometimes a whole family of brothers, so maybe he'd physically transmitted an ancient Himalayan women's secret of parturition at will in return for her

vegetable lasagna and the pleasure it gave him to make an older, larger American woman writhe in her own bed for two hours and twelve minutes.

She wasn't quite six months along when she got up one evening from her Scan back chair after a long session in front of the PC and hot water spilled over the teak and leather and splashed the apricot broadloom. She barely had time to grab the bath sheet from the towel rack, peel off her leggings and get on the bed before she began to push, or, more accurately, before one of her organs began to pull apart from her innards and move downwards, her guts spreading apart to let it emerge. She felt the bones of her pelvis unhinge, balance, and then the organ slid past her labia and emerged with a liquid pop that was like taking a wet finger out of the mouth of a bottle. She lay there stunned, breathing through her mouth and watching the shadow of the cobweb high above on the cathedral ceiling sway back and forth, then she closed her mouth, swallowed, and reared up on her elbows to look between her legs.

Well, of course it was a mess, that's what she got for not being bunged as her doctor had wanted. The part of her that had come out moved feebly, sticky against her thighs; it was probably cold, so Eloise pushed with her heels into the mattress and felt her pelvis shift while a final spurt of something hot soaked the towel beneath her bottom. Her legs were weak, the muscles shaking with reaction, but she couldn't justify staying in that awkward position any longer, so she grasped her right leg behind the knee with both hands and lifted it carefully over, watching so that the ball of her foot would not touch the part of her that had come out. She paused in the act of lifting her leg: beyond the contours of her knee she saw her internal organ lying on the bath sheet in a puddle of juice, full as a balloon fills with water and mauve, probably from the shock of emerging suddenly from a 98.6-plus peritoneum into the 68-degree air. Eloise was cold herself and she shuddered with her leg in the air, so she quickly leaned sideways and put her right leg down next to her left leg. The bones of her pelvis settled back together and locked. She huddled her arms across her breasts and hunched down to her thighs, then reached to the bedside chair for her terrycloth robe, but instead of drawing her arms through the sleeves she carefully tucked it around the emerged part of herself without looking at it too closely.

She made it to the bathroom, which was only four

steps from her side of the bed. She showered quickly, more of a rinse really, just enough to warm herself up and sluice off the juice, as Dave used to say. She didn't take long, two minutes, but leaving a part of herself alone on the bed like that even while she took what was a necessary and extremely abridged hot shower made her feel neglectful, as though she had taken off her breasts with her bra and left them in the bracups on top of the dresser. When her muscles stopped trembling, she turned off the hot water and towelled and got into fresh sweats and a maxipad.

She – it – that other part of her left on the bed – it hadn't dislodged the robe, though it moved feebly beneath it, slight uncoordinated heavings along its circumference. Parts of the terrycloth had soaked through with a thin rusty-brown liquid, so Eloise half-lifted it in the robe and wrapped it in the towel she took from her hair, then picked it up in her arms and carried it to the bathroom. The organ was a warm satisfying weight that she naturally rested along the length of her arm, and it nestled close to her, shifting subtly like a balloon filled with water, trying to mould itself to her outside now that it was no longer held in shape by her insides. It beat with a rhythm that matched her own heart, its delicate weight shifting liquidly with each beat like unmoulded jello that is carried to the table with quick steps.

She sat down on the closed toilet and unwrapped the cloth enough to uncover what seemed to be its top. It had an open duct that sucked in and blew out air – it wheezed a little; maybe there was still liquid in its tubes. She wiped a bit of matter off the triangular opening, then shut the sink drain and ran warm water, sudsing with her French-milled facial soap in one hand under the faucet while she balanced the still-wrapped organ against her knees. When the sink was half-full of creamy suds, she peeled off the terrycloth swaddling and dipped the organ into the water. It squirmed in what seemed like pleasure, certainly not pain, and she let it rest deeper, careful not to let the suds near the open duct.

The thin raisin-coloured encrustation washed off easily, staining the suds like rust, so she drained the sink and rinsed the organ, letting the fresh warm water flow over her hand and out of her palm in the way her mother had rinsed Matty and John and Bobbi in the kitchen sink, Eloise's eyes barely above the counter, just as her eyes now were on a level with the toothbrush holder on the wall beneath the medicine cabinet.

When the organ was clean and sweet-smelling and she felt as though the muscles between her shoulder blades had begun to tear from the strain of stretching forward to the sink while sitting on the john, she balanced the wet organ on her chest over the Vuarnet logo, swivelled carefully around in her bare feet on the cool ceramic tiles, gripping with her toes in the grout for balance, and took out two of the remaining five clean towels from the linen closet behind the bathroom door. She laid a towel over the organ, then bent forward and let it fall into her arms inside the towel. She sat on the side of the jacuzzi and bundled the used bathsheet and her robe wet side in and left them in the tub, then smoothed a palmful of Clinique aloe-vitamin E lotion

all over the organ except by the duct.

Its skin was so tender, it was hardly skin at all, kind of a thin membrane like the translucent skin of an egg beneath the shell. She was afraid her fingers would tear it and poke through into whatever it was made of underneath. Now that she looked at it closely she was becoming almost accustomed to its appearance, though she felt a bubbling panic every time she let herself think that something that had been inside her had come out. It felt like a water balloon, like a ripe purple plum that was bursting with juice beneath its thin membrane; she was afraid she was leaving thumbprints in vital places.

Now that she looked at it closely, she could not identify what organ it could possibly be. Aside from feeling a little strung out, she was functioning as usual, heart thudding, intestines rumbling, blood squirting into the interstices between cells. Perhaps it was her spleen. She remembered that the spleen was the one organ a person could live without, and it seemed about the right size and shape for a self-assertive spleen that had swollen enough to force its way out of the body. Perhaps it was her vermiform appendix, triggered by some genetic or environmental stimulus (the Thai?) into biological independence.

She shivered as she crossed the seven steps from the jacuzzi to her side of the bed. She pulled up the comforter and huddled beneath it in a foetal position, the swaddled organ placed within the angle of her raised knees and hunched torso. If this wasn't her spleen or her vermiform appendix, then what as it? And would her spleen or her vermiform appendix somehow chemically notice the absence of this self-assertive organ and begin to swell until her body rejected it like the furry heart of a chimpanzee?

She was reminded of the Visible Woman she had put together when she was eleven, except those pig-pink and salt-water-taffy-taupe and oxblood-leather-red organs had been firm rounded plastic while this escaped organ was slithery and had threatened to slide to the floor until she swaddled it into shape in a clean towel. The Visible Woman, more lovely than any Barbie with her clear plastic skin and arms opened, palms out, serene even as she went organless, nesting in the brown cardboard of her box... surely she herself, Eloise, could retain her serenity if another organ took it upon itself to swell up and pop out. Eloise tucked the comforter around herself and fell asleep.

She was awakened in the dark by a seeping wetness under her side down to her waist and up to the elbow beneath her pillow. She lay immobilized in the stage between sleeping and waking, then, coming fully awake, she was afraid to move, afraid that the wetness was blood. The organ in the crook of her body strained against the swaddling. The desire for light grew unbearable but she didn't want to move and make things worse so she lay there, her muscles tightening into cramps, until the moon swung round and shone enough light through the vertical blinds for her to see the organ's futile heavings. She drew herself up, bending at the hips, twisted around and turned on the bedside light.

Yes, it was blood, she thought as she saw the towels and sheets and pillow soaked in brown liquid, but

then her eyes adjusted. The liquid was too thin, not glutinous like blood that clotted; it was thin and rusty-brown and she realized that it had come from the organ: it was the same kind of juice she had washed off after it had emerged. She held her sweatshirt away from her front with two fingers, then pulled it up by the hem over her head and dropped it on the bed. Odd wheezes came from the duct opening. She rolled off the bed and hurried into the bathroom and showered again. When she had finished, she pulled on another sweatsuit, this time an old one. Her bag of maxipads was nearly empty and what was she going to do about towels?

The organ was wheezing louder now; it was very annoying. As she went back into the bedroom she felt something running down her stomach. She looked down at her chest – there were two wet spots on her clean sweatshirt already. In time to the wheezing of the organ, her breasts pulsed thin milk.

“God damn it –” Her voice cracked. She pulled off the sweatshirt and hooked on her bra, tight now; she had to squirm to put it on. Her breasts were hard and overflowed the cups. It was very uncomfortable, but what was she supposed to do? She stuffed the cups around the nipples with toilet paper, then took the struggling organ off the bed, still wrapped in the soggy towels, and put it down on the clean tiles of the bathroom floor. She stripped the bed and made a bundle of the bedclothes and the bathsheet and robe she had left in the jacuzzi, ran downstairs and put them into the washing machine, then grabbed a pile of blue-checked linen dishcloths out of the kitchen cabinet and went back up the stairs.

The organ in its wriggings had squirmed behind the toilet. She ran warm water in the sink and bent down and undid the wet towels and picked the heavy wet part of herself off the floor and set it in the sink. She didn’t bother with soap or lotion this time. When the organ was clean she lapped it around in four dishcloths, then, careful not to slip in her bare feet on the wet tiles, she balanced the organ in one arm against her breast and awkwardly picked up the bundle of wet towels. She carried the organ and the towels downstairs and got the towels into the washer before the wash cycle was over.

The organ was squirming now, not strongly but she was afraid she would drop it. In the bright white light of the laundry room, she could see into the duct as it wheezed and smacked wetly. She fought down a feeling of panic. It was part of her own body. It wanted something. Her milk had seeped out of the toilet paper in her bra.

She took her Hungarian cotton tablecloth off the pile of clean folded laundry and went to the sofa. She laid the lurching organ down while she unhooked her too-small bra; she picked up the organ and attached the triangular duct to her nipple. She scooted back into the corner, then threw the tablecloth out over herself so that it covered her from neck to feet.

The triangular duct closed over her nipple. It made an airtight seal and sucked. She shut her eyes tightly and felt the organ contract as it drew the milk from the gland. Her breast became smaller, the hardness was sucked out and she was left with one flaccid breast and one swollen one. The organ let go of the flaccid breast. She offered it the hard nipple and it

clamped down eagerly. She felt her second breast draining and becoming limp as the organ swelled tight with milk. She dozed, and when she woke up the early sun was shining rectangles of yellow through the pergola into the French doors and the Hungarian cotton tablecloth and the blue-checked linen dish-towels and her old sweatsuit and the sofa cushions were soaked through with the rusty-brown juice that oozed from the organ and the thin pale blue leakage from her breasts.

Some time that morning, with the organ wrapped in a white cotton shirt, glutted with milk, lying stupefied on a mat of folded summer blankets in a corner of the bedroom, she herself wearing a mismatched pair of Dave’s old pyjamas that she had stuffed into a drawer and forgotten, sometime that morning she took the phone out of the cupboard and order diaper service, to start that afternoon; she called a delivery service and had them shop for groceries; she got on her computer and ordered a bassinet and changing table, a Snuggly, two dozen towels, three terrycloth robes, half-a-dozen sweatsuits and three nursing bras, and, after racking her brains, rejecting tea cosies, squash racquet covers, and quilted cover-ups for tissue paper boxes, decided on fifteen corduroy pillow shams with velcro closures.

Some time that month, wearing one of her new robes stained in yellow and brown, carrying the organ dressed in a diaper and a pillow sham across her chest in the Snuggly, not caring whether the amber light that came in through the French doors was sunrise or sunset, she took the few moments when the organ was not hungry or squirming or oozing to hunt through the bookshelves for the new Stephen Jay Gould that had come from the book club six months before: there was a drawing in it that she had to look up. She couldn’t stand not knowing what it was that had come out of her. She had given up the idea that it was her spleen after she lay on the floor and palped under her left ribs. She couldn’t be sure she felt her spleen there but she didn’t feel any gap. And the idea that it was her vermiform appendix was absurd – swollen appendices didn’t make their own way out, they had to be cut out. She was afraid the organ was a placenta that had somehow absorbed the foetus and that idea made her queasy even as she washed and fed and swaddled it, trying to keep it from unmaking itself now that it no longer belonged within the biology of her body but didn’t yet fit any human identity. It seemed to be maturing: its wheezing was less like a bellows with a leak and more like a squeezebox; its movements were less pulsating and more muscular; its pores seemed to be closing – it didn’t ooze that rusty-brown juice as copiously, and the protective membrane was toughening up, not like a skin, more like a bag it was growing itself into.

She searched all the shelves, then found the book in its blue cover in her night-table drawer. She opened it to the end and there was the picture: a drawing made from a fossil of *Pikaia gracilens*, a proto-chordate from the Middle Cambrian era. There were the dorsal structure that hinted at a backbone, and the striated musculature, like the scrap of her own womb she passed once, a clean pink square of rubbery corduroy. But she couldn’t name the organ *Pikaia*. It only

resembled *Pikaia* in a general way – certainly it wasn't long and arrow-headed, and she couldn't be sure of the spine yet; and though *Pikaia* itself was not an ugly name, it would be like naming a baby daughter *Annelida* – earthworm.

She cast around for an alternative, weighing the book in her hand. The organ existed, it was a particular, individual thing with a certain identity that had to have a name – she couldn't keep thinking "it." But her field was information systems, not binomial nomenclature. Stephen Jay Gould was the one who knew all about that. So why not name the organ after him? Goldie? Stephen? Stephanie? How could she know whether it was male or female? It was part of her own body, and she knew that all embryos are female at first, but she couldn't be sure. Maybe it was of no gender at all. "Stevie," she said aloud. She looked down into the Snugli at the organ's top, where the open duct fluttered, breathing. "Little Stevie," she said, trying it out.

As she looked, the organ erupted with juice, liquid pouring from its triangular duct, soaking through the diaper and the pillow sham and the Snugli and her stained robe. It was too much, too disgusting. She gagged and retched and pulled the Snugli off, dropped the organ none too gently onto the rug, then ran with her hands across her mouth to the toilet and vomited, bile burning her mouth again and again. She flung off the robe and scrubbed her chest with a towel and frantically searched in her closet for something clean to wear. She grabbed a t-shirt dress and pulled it on, jammed her feet into loafers, and got out, taking her windbreaker off the hook before she slammed the door. She stumbled down the concrete steps, across the sidewalk, and ran into the tree next to the curb. Her forehead scraped against the bark, she twisted her ankle on the root that roiled above the grass, she threw out her arms to steady herself and stood there embracing the tree.

The bark was cool against her cheek and her palms. She stood with her eyes closed, catching her breath. The leaves rustled softly overhead. A branch creaked minutely. She slowly relaxed, just breathing, then she opened her eyes and looked up. It was a maple tree, the wide fabric of the leaves spread by tendons like a pterodactyl's wings. She looked up from the moving green leaves through yellow to red to the tips of the topmost twigs where the leaves had already fallen. The sky was blue. It was a beautiful autumn morning. She heard traffic down at the corner; a schoolbus came through the green light and roared past her. She turned her head to watch as it went past and stopped down the block. Children got on, children who pointed and laughed. Self-consciously she stepped back from the tree and straightened her dress around her thighs, pushed her hair off her face, winced and touched her forehead where a lump was already forming.

What an idiot she'd been. She must have been out of her mind, must have taken Kevin's abandonment more strongly than she'd been willing to admit. That thing in there was a tumour or something that her body had rejected – an unborn twin? She'd read awful stories about that, horror-magazine stuff – it was something parasitical and disgusting, and she was

still letting it be a parasite on her, locking herself away in the condo and ignoring her job and cleaning up after it compulsively and letting it – letting it suckle – She had to get to a doctor, stick the thing in a plastic bag like a specimen and go to the emergency room. Who knew what damage she'd done herself by not seeing a doctor before this? She'd ask the doctor to recommend a shrink, she'd been wrong to refuse counselling after the breakup. She'd be all right now. The first thing to do was get the thing into a plastic bag and then call a doctor. She limped back up the stairs, her ankle aching, and hesitated at the door. She didn't even have to come back here after this, she could check into a hotel for a couple of days and have a cleaning service scrub everything down, get in a new carpet, new linens, hell, put Kevin's damn condo on the market if she wanted.

She resolutely opened the door, got a plastic garbage bag from the kitchen cabinet and went to the bedroom, holding her breath. A flash of colour caught her eye, like a little rainbow thrown by a prism. Sunlight slanted in through the bedroom window and there was a tiny rainbow in the air. It was a little bubble, floating. As she looked, another bubble rose from the floor on the far side of the bed, rose into the sunlight and split the light into colours. Something – chuckled? a sound of deep satisfaction and delight. Eloise moved past the bed and saw the organ on the floor. A bubble formed on its duct and was puffed into the air. As the bubble caught the light, the organ chuckled. Eloise came closer, the bag ready, and then jerked back in astonishment. There were eyes – its eyes had opened! It looked at her out of eyes as brown and wondering as her own. She knelt beside it. "Stevie," she whispered, "you came awake."

The brown eyes grew alarmed and the three-cornered duct twitched and wrinkled in distress. Eloise gathered Stevie into her arms but Stevie twisted away. Then Stevie recognized Eloise's warmth, her touch, her scent. The brown eyes crinkled merrily. The two lower corners of the mouth curled up. Stevie chuckled with delight.

Eloise gasped. Joy flooded through her, forcing tears to her eyes. "You smiled – I saw it – you smiled at me," she cried. She lifted Stevie up to her face, cuddling the tender membrane against her cheek. She kissed the forehead. "Stevie, my little Stevie," she crooned, "my own little child."

Sally Darnowsky is a writer, new to us, who lives in Maryland, USA. She says that she has recently sold stories to *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* and its sister publication, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. She has also written a good deal of non-fiction for other magazines and reference books.

Corrosion

Michael Cobley

Choose to live in a city, and the city will live in you. I lived in the alloy and plastic tiers of London all my life, never truly understanding what the real London was – or what its servants were capable of – till the night two Rafterboys came up from Rail City to make a deal.

Myron and Byron said they were brothers, but they didn't look much alike to me. Sure, both had the short-cropped bleached hair, the Eye-of-Horus tattoos on their eyelids, and the droopy black cloaks, obligatory regalia for Rafterflock members. But where Myron was a beefy, big-handed youth with a deep, strangely musical voice, Byron was a restless hummingbird of a kid who scarcely spoke at all. I watched them sidle and squeeze into my tiny office, then leaned back in my chair and said, "Well?"

"Got some great stuff, Emma." Myron said, hefting a black, ribbed nylon holdall onto my desk. Something in the holdall clanked dully.

"Great?" I snapped. "Like those Moroccan mini-decks you palmed off on me last month? My techie had to overhaul every one just to make them do more than tell the time and play a tune!"

Not strictly true, but I was feeling frayed and irritable. A friend had called me at my apt earlier, and her news hadn't been reassuring at all.

Byron tittered from the top of my filing cabinet where he'd perched like an oversized raven, and Myron gave me his haggling grin.

"Perhaps we should go, neh?" As he stood, the folds of his cloak fell open and light from my desk lamp glittered on the scores of charms pinned to the lining. "Maybe pay the Turk a visit –"

"Okay, okay," I said. "Just show."

He unloaded various items of hooked hardware and I checked them out, ran a few tests and the like. But most of my thoughts were going over what I had been told on the fone. "It's Steve," Miriam had said. She worked in a beatbar down in the Minster and occasionally put business my way. "He was in asking for you but I said I hadn't seen you for a while. He left a few minutes ago."

And was, I knew, out there searching for me right now. Cancelling the last two years as if they'd never been, forcing me to recall memories I'd thought gone forever...

Myron's booty was mostly headspace gear, six modules and a Hungarian player. I finished looking them over and named a price. He laughed.

"Hey, you born this way or did you have to practice,

like? Liberating all this was risky, you know. Worth a thousand, easy."

"Say, that's right. How many in your gang? – fifteen? Twenty?" I smiled. "Six-fifty."

"Of course, we can always throw in more software."

He handed across a clear plastic bag bulging with garishly coloured ROMpak add-ons. Most seemed factory-new, apart from a dark grey, egg-shaped one whose sockets were worn and scratched.

"Thousand?"

"Deal," I said.

Once they were gone (grinning and winking demently at each other), I closed and locked the door. Then dragged a backpack from a desk drawer and filled it with all the gear, giving myself no time to think. Myron and Byron had taken a ten-flight stairway that would bring them out at one of the lower plazas of Hammersmith district. Me, I slung the pack over my shoulder and left by the skylight.

Twenty minutes and five levels later, I was stepping out of a service door and into the hectic bustle of Hammersmith's Silver Tier, the glitterglow of shopping arcades and galleries. I paused for a moment on the edge of all that commerce, and reflections of me (slim, black wild-all-over hair, steel-blue jacket, black jeans) waited in glass pillars and ceiling mirrors. Then I slipped easily into the shifting gaudy crowd. But I still felt vulnerable and it was an effort to convince myself that this trip to see Danny, my techie, was business, not hiding out. Too much effort.

I rode the cabletrain to Camden, and descended the busiest stair-spirals past increasingly shabby levels till I reached the Chalktown Partmart. Then followed well-lit walkways round the huge, ramshackle market to the rear where Danny had his workshop. When I entered on my own key, he glanced up from a chunk of circuitry clamped to his bench.

"Emma! Such a surprise. More plunder, I assume?"

"Yeah, from Rail City this time."

He sighed. "Was it for this that they built the Tunnel? Ah well, let's see what there is, shall we?"

Danny was a slender, middle-aged man with bushy silver hair, aristo mannerisms, and a liking for hand-rolled cigarettes. He examined each item with a kind of languid intentness, occasionally nodding to himself. He was scrutinizing the headspace player, long pale fingers fitting a probe to one of its sockets, when he said, "I had a call about half an hour ago –"

I stood there frozen, listening.

“— from a fellow by the name of Steve, saying that he’s a friend of yours —”

“He’s not a friend!”

The words came out in a rush of anger and fear, and Danny looked at me. “It’s all right, I didn’t tell him anything. Are you in some kind of trouble, Emma?”

“Nothing serious.” I managed a laugh. “Just a piece of the past that doesn’t know when to quit.”

“Well, if you need a place to stay...”

“It’s okay, Danny, I’ve already arranged somewhere.”

I could tell he didn’t believe me, but he shrugged his bony shoulders. “Right. So...any more ill-gotten gains?”

“Just a few ROMpaks which I’m taking over to a gridsman I know.” I zipped shut the backpack and put it on.

“And you’re going now?”

“Biz won’t wait.”

“Biz,” he said with mocking distaste. “Incidentally, who sold you the goods?”

“Myron and Byron.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “Yes, our Myron called for you, too, not five minutes before you arrived. Sounded quite agitated.” He regarded me evenly. “And you’re sure it’s nothing serious?”

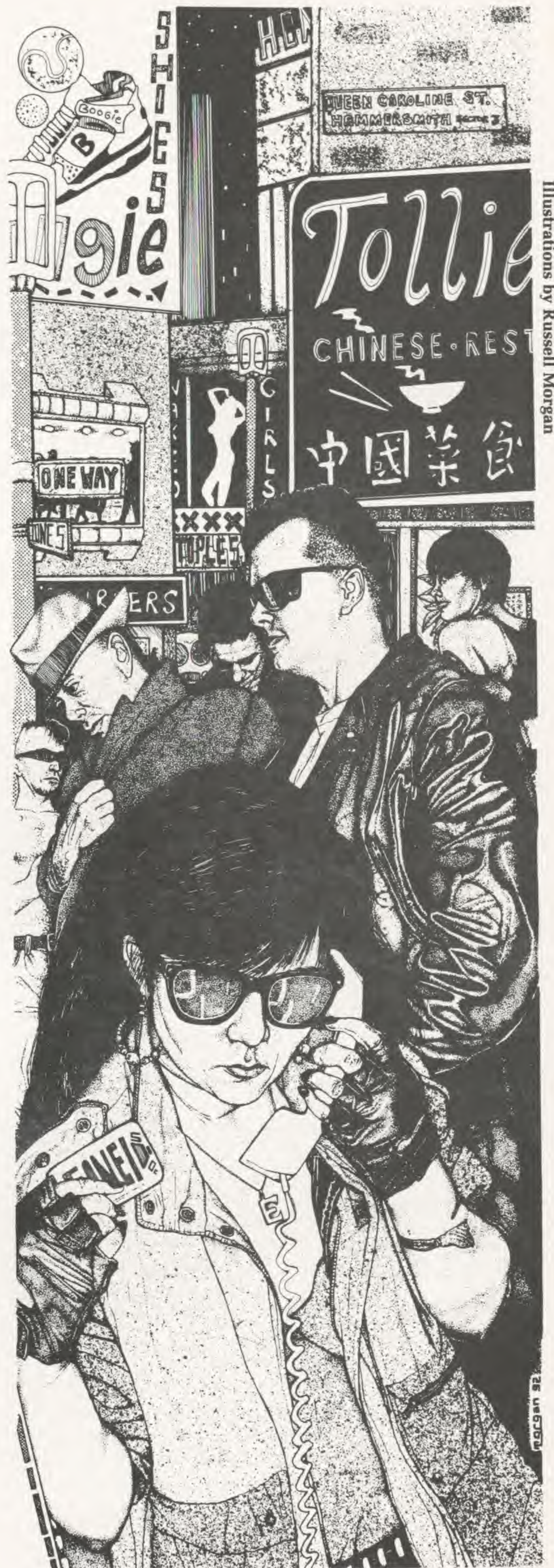
“Hey —” I shot him my best streetsmart smile “— I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about me.”

As I turned to leave, he spread his hands. “Young lady, someone has to.”

I returned to Hammersmith and ended up in the Asquith gardendome, making calls from a booth in the foyer. But it was late and it seemed that everyone I knew (and Steve didn’t) was busy or out. So I drifted down the long curved foyer, past troughs of greenery, pausing now and then to gaze out at the city in the night. A terrain of lights, the bright zig-zurats of Knightsbridge and the other New Districts, the Crystal Stair with all its boutiques and cafés sweeping down through the city, beautiful holograms unfolding in midair to act out enticements and invitations.

And I felt somehow trapped and abandoned, a nasty desperate feeling which was the dominant memory from my involvement with Steve. I remembered a six-band benefit gig at The Floating Dog three years ago, remembered seeing Steve for the first time singing lead vocals while playing a multisynth cased in transparent perspex. His face beaded with sweat, features cast in sharp relief by the lighting rig, voice so full of emotion it could reach you, *shake you like nothing else*.

Onstage, his intensity was all channelled livewire essence, and between us it created heights of arousal and completeness I’d never known before. But gradually it turned into an obsession, *his* obsession. He gave up live rehearsals, quit songwriting, and turned his attention to me, concentrated all his effort on needing me. Six months after that benefit I decided “no more” and left him. The next six months became a rising curve of craziness as his calls and messages begging me to come back turned into a campaign of revenge. Harassing fone calls, poison letters, hoax



Illustrations by Russell Morgan

letters to the police, threatening graffiti on my apt door, being followed – my world seemed to close around me like jaws. Then suddenly the intimidation ceased, a pause, I thought, to lull me into a false sense of security. But a week stretched into a month and I began picking up bits and pieces of my life, making contacts, clinching a few deals, getting by...

I laid my hands against the foyer's cold glass wall, blotting out from view the New Districts, glowing heights of the city. But I couldn't blot out the sheer presence of all that wealth. Dominions of credit, empires of the coin. Even Steve was aware of it and charged his lyrics with aggression and dissent – "A corroding dream of power," he once wrote. But he was flawed too, in a way that deformed him from within.

Deliberately, I pushed thoughts of him aside, trying instead to imagine the never-dark walkways and semi-slums of lower London, haunts of my long-fled childhood. Wondering if I could find somewhere safe down there –

Then something gave and I was suddenly full of anger, and an unreasoning hate for Steve, for this casual demolition of my life. And I was angry at myself for panicking so easily. Why let him do this to me? He was only one man. Why should I run like this?

I let my hands fall in fists, leaving five-fingered halos dissipating on the icy glass. Then I headed for the foyer exit and took an elevator back down into Hammersmith.

My apt was a single room in a shabby, mid-level shelf block buttressed to one of the eighty or so pillars holding up the district. I came down from the level above by using a shadowy fire escape bolted to the pillar's raw concrete face and hidden from sight by massive hoardings. Reaching the shelf block's corner, I unlocked my apt's skylight and, swift and smooth, was inside.

I dived around the room with the backpack open, burying the ROMpaks under clothes, datadiscs, a battered half-read paperback, and a combat spray from beneath my bed. Then downloaded files from the desktop into my pocketbase, wiped the desktop stores, and was crossing to the skylight when I glanced out the window.

Smoke was pouring from a tiny window near the roof of a prefab warehouse diagonally opposite. I stared, a frozen instant. My office.

I scrambled up out of the apt, flipped the skylight shut, and headed off towards the rear of the pillar where cables and gantries webbed the gaps between buildings. The backpack bumped against my shoulderblades as I ran across an iron catwalk twenty feet up. Sirens whooped and wailed behind me. Images of Steve in my mind, hunting.

Breathing hard, I turned a corner –

Below, in the neon light of a Thai bistro, people were gathering round a black form lying prone on the ground. I slowed. Thin limbs, bleached hair, sharp features, one hand tangled in a black cloak, the other outflung and resting in a pool of something darker than water.

I dragged myself away from the sight and fled along a narrow side passage lit by fading biostrips. I caught

the harsh echoes of running footsteps somewhere nearby, took the next right away from them, then down a flight of steps into a shadowy alley off a main piazza. I was halfway to the beckoning brightness of boutiques and salons when strong hands grabbed me, spun me round. Sick with fear, I let fly, fists and feet, breathing in to scream.

Fingers clamped around my throat and drove me back against the wall. There were snipping sounds, then his other hand yanked the backpack out from between me and the wall. Felt pain as I choked, grey waves starting to roar through my head, and far away a voice said:

"Let her go, Jacky."

"Bitch went tae hit me!"

"I said let her go."

The grip loosened and I fell on hands and knees, gasping and coughing. Through blurred sight I glimpsed my attacker as he hunkered down with my backpack and casually pulled it apart. The heavy nylon tore like rotten cloth and the contents spilled out. His hand found the bag of ROMpaks, they clattered on the concrete and one was selected.

"Is that it?"

The man called Jacky grinned. "Aye, there she is," and held up the egg-shaped unit, its slate-grey surface studded with tiny knobs and sockets. The second man crouched down, took the egg and examined it, then he looked at me. It was Steve, and a part of me was glad.

"Emma, love, you know the strangest people."

As he smiled I saw something glint deep in his mouth.

There were four others in the big elevator besides ourselves. Four lean Cruisers, complete with studded industrial gloves, dented metal caps, and knee-high skateboots, all probably heading down to a rough rendezvous in the stagnant alleys of Hammersmith subdistrict. They got in five levels after we did, leering and acting threatening – till Jacky the Scotsman did a trick with one of my ROMpaks that left pieces of circuitry and emerald-green plastic casing on the elevator floor. They ignored us after that, and didn't follow when we got out one stop above last level.

"We walk from here," Steve said.

We'd come out in a mall intersection called Goldhawk Market, bright little pinspots in the low, dimpled ceiling, shop windows full of economy merchandise. Security cameras tracked us along the wide, deserted corridor, but I was thinking about the gleaming blades that had emerged from the underside of Jacky's hand as he took the ROMpak from his topcoat pocket and crushed it. He was augmented so I knew he had to be corporate. Which meant, of course, that Steve was too.

"It wasn't us that torched your office," he said. "Or killed your contact."

"Yeah? Guess he just died of boredom, then. Amazing."

Jacky snorted. "A smart aleck. Let's ditch her."

"It wasn't us," Steve repeated, ignoring him. "Your filcher friends got hold of something acquired for us in Austria, and it seems the original owners were just as good at tracing our courier's last movements as our

people. I knew the Rafterboys dealt through you, but you're still lucky we got to you first."

We were away from the mall now, heading along Kensington Parade, a grey, litter-strewn concourse, an avenue of neglect. Passing two-metre-high sign panels stripped of their ads and densely covered in graffiti, murky snarls speckled with bright curlicues. About a block away I saw a group of gangteens clamber one by one over a short section of wall: the Iron Rainbows, I guessed, or a squad of Apostles. Both had made moves against the Cruiser faction lately.

"So what is it?" I said, walking between them, testing the straps binding my wrists. "This thing you, ah, acquired?"

"Nosy wee smart aleck, too." The Scotsman laughed darkly. "Want to know what's in it, darlin'? Do ye?" He glanced at Steve who remained silent, watching. "There's worlds in there, nightmares, miracles, new monsters. Terrible beauty, and beautiful terror."

Somehow we'd slowed to a halt in the cold amber light of an overhead fluorescent. Steve shook his head, amused.

"Poetry, Jacky?"

"Aye, Stevie-boy – poetic, that's me. But I'll tell ye this for nothing –" and his mood switched into a kind of restrained fury, "– any trouble from her and she's dead, get me? And if the run crashes, it'll be your neck on the line, no' mine."

Steve sighed. "Look, we've got the cell, the run won't crash, and Emma won't be a problem." He turned his gaze on me. "I'm sure she understands her situation."

They seemed to study me for a moment. I saw reflections of myself in their unwinking eyes and inside I was cold with dread and involuntary images of razor fingers grasping me, cutting. Suddenly, I didn't understand, but nodded anyway.

"Good," Jacky said. "She'd better." He jerked a thumb at a wide, lowlit door across the concourse. "That the way?"

And Steve gave him a look I'd never seen before, strange and faintly smiling. "Yes, that's the way down."

We descended into a sombre environment of flooded streets and mouldering buildings. It all looked far more grey and cramped than I remembered, the ancient facades more rotted, the graffiti more demented. There was a background city murmur from the level above, overlaid with our footsteps as Steve led us along a route of canalside passages and ramshackle bridges. Infrequent biolamps shed sickly yellow light on trash piles and chunks of fallen masonry. There were people down there, a few, but all we saw were two men deep in conversation on a bridge, and the occasional glimpse of someone hurrying through the walkway shadows opposite.

Half an hour later we were climbing again, dank crumbling stairs, up five floors to a big empty room where the air was mildew-moist and boards creaked underfoot. A wide, ragged gap in one wall looked out at a huge city pillar rising amid a jumble of sagging roofs and derelict office blocks. Jacky went over, rested a foot on a ridge of brick and wallpaper and nodded.

"This'll do. Got the rig?"

Steve took a long flat case from inside his trenchcoat and tossed it lightly to the Scotsman who caught it with ease.

"How long?"

"Fifteen minutes to crack and download." Steve had produced the egg-shaped thing, the "cell," and was plugging it into some kind of minideck. "Another five to get over to you – twenty-five absolute maximum. Assuming I don't trip its defences."

"Fine, but just keep yer eye on sweet thing here, okay?"

"And I was going to let her go so she could lead Logos right to us."

"What a comedian." Jacky gave me a smile full of malice. "I'm just splittin' ma sides." Then he was gone, out through the gap in the wall.

I shuddered. "What a creep. Steve, just what is going on –"

"Ever heard the expression 'faithful son,' Emma? Well, that's Jacky: faithful. To the bone. Despises anything that gets between him and his duty."

"Duty? He's a killer –"

"Shut up." Suddenly he was staring straight at me, and I saw it then, the deadly honed purpose that filled him and seemed to spill into the air between us. "People like you, scrambling after tiny deals, living tiny lives in this city... and you've no idea what the real city is. Forget glass and stone, or flesh and blood – the real London is all power and information, a kind of death force that goes everywhere and touches everyone. What do you know about that?" He laughed softly. "Nothing. You've all been turned into property and you don't know it. Everything's corrupt but you don't see it. Everything."

"Even you?"

He was silent a moment, just gazing at the minideck in his hand, at the characters and symbols on its little grey screen. "I was jumped one night, ended up in a public welfare clinic owned by the Logos Corporation. I was in a bad way, they offered me radical surgery, and I took it. Went through dozens of operations, and they were so friendly, so persuasive, so good at lying. And all so that a senior executive could make an addition to his retinue of faithful sons." He was nearer now, an arm's length away. "Only our lord and master has screwed up. His back's to the wall and the board is getting ready to chop him off at the hips. So what does he do? He makes a private deal with a senior exec at Heliotek, Logos' main rival, plans a merger that'll boost him up high and far away from any hint of corruption. But Heliotek's stock is too solid for a takeover, so he arranges for a piece of very secret technology to vanish from the Logos facility in Salzburg..."

I looked at the cell, grey egg cupped in his right hand, and felt a kind of dread. "What is it? What's it for?"

"Heliotek are heavily into molecular engineering, tailored viruses. They're just like Logos and the rest, rotten with greed and power. Their European headquarters are on Hammersmith's Golden Tier. Most of their top theorists are up there right now, getting ready for a big meeting in the morning. Except I'm going to bring them down, bring it all down..."

He was close, so close I could have rested my head

on his shoulder. But I said, "Steve, the cell – what does it do?"

"Makes machines out of molecules, any kind you want, do any job you want." He raised a hand to my face, to stroke my cheek.

"Don't..."

"Save a child's life," he went on, voice expressionless, "create a work of art, build a ship...or change concrete and steel into gravel and dust." And he turned to look out the gap in the wall.

The city pillar. I knew without following his gaze. In the cold stillness he was like a statue carved from granite, solid and unyielding, a form in the half-dark. And I just couldn't make a sound, caught there in the vicinity of all that madness.

"There's so much we can do with the cell. Jacky's a problem, though. He's loyal. Probably suspects I'll try to kill him before or after the pillar's seeded. Let's not disappoint him."

Minutes later, and he was leading me by my still-bound hands across a precarious country of decrepit roofs and rickety ganttries slung between buildings, eave to eave.

Through my mind flowed images from every disaster movie and every vidnews report on urban catastrophe I'd ever seen, with all his words coming back again and again like curses and judgments from a dream of anger. I tried deflecting my thoughts, tried to imagine what kind of surgery Steve had undergone, gleaming metal instead of bones, perhaps, or tireless myoelectric composites in the place of musculature, or any streetmyth hearsay of lethal implants concealed in the niches of the body...

Collapsing buildings. Gouts of fire from the compacted infernos of rooms and corridors. Screams of the trapped. Water trickling from broken floors, pooling further down. Lights of rescue vehicles flickering through an ocean of smoke. In my head, visions of destruction, death in the city. There was no escape.

We followed corroded metal stairs down between two buildings, splashed along a sewage-puddled alley, then cut to the right through an archway in a high brick wall furred with mould –

"Up here, shitheads," came a voice.

Before us was vertical concrete, pitted and stained, and Jacky grinned down from the edge of some wide platform, with the pillar itself behind him, towering. "Took yer time," he said. "Ladder's over there," then turned, moved out of sight.

"Steve," I said as he led me along, "Steve, you can't do this..."

"But I am doing it."

"People will die, you bastard!..."

In an instant his hand went from my wrists to my neck, gripping my jacket collar. "There's plenty of ways to die, Emma. All I'm interested in is killing the killers who have money and power, that's all. Now –" He swung me towards the ladder, "– climb."

The platform turned out to be a long shelf broken by sloping buttresses and shallow recesses. One recess had a small tripod fixed at shoulder-height to its rear and Jacky was lounging beside it, the flat case lying open and empty at his feet.

Steve made me sit down with my back to the buttress nearby, said, "Don't move," and strolled over

to Jacky. The Scotsman had removed his heavy coat, revealing a sleeveless flak jacket so black his torso merged with the shadows behind him, leaving head and arms looking pale and disembodied, mannequin components awaiting assembly.

"Your big moment," I heard him say.

From his pocket Steve took the cell and the minideck, still wired up, and carefully began attaching them to the tripod. The two men talked in voices too low to make out but I could sense the tension between them, and Jacky's razor-bright gaze never left Steve's face. Sitting there in the dimness, cold concrete under me, I watched them out of a claustrophobic conviction that the world had shrunk to this place. Conspirators and captive, and all the levels of residences and offices and malls hanging in my mind like a colossal ghost of havoc waiting to happen.

Steve let his hands fall to his sides, as if finished, and murmured something. Jacky laughed quietly, nodded, then hit him.

He didn't swing, or lean into it, or pull back and lash out. He just stood immobile as his fist came up in a blur and delivered a blow that sent Steve flying. But somehow Steve managed to twist into a roll that brought him to his feet. He straightened, shrugged off his coat, and stepped lightly towards Jacky.

They fought in sudden flurries of ferocity, blow and block, sidestep and duck. Their mutual hatred was like a halo of violence, a zone outside of which nothing existed for them. They seemed to forget me, yet I dared not move. Soon both were bleeding from various cuts and scrapes. Steve seemed to have the upper hand until he made a lunge which the Scotsman used to pull him off-balance and casually flip him over the edge of the shelf. Without a backward glance the Scotsman went after him, hands on the concrete brink as he vaulted down into the dark.

Subdued noises, muffled blows, a gasp. Sound of running feet, pursuit receding. They were gone. I was alone.

I closed my eyes and saw destruction...

In seconds I was on my feet and stumbling across to the tripod in its recess. Wires snapped as I grabbed the cell from its plastic cradle at the tripod's apex, and lights began blinking on the minideck which had been clipped to a tripod leg. The cell buzzed in my hands for an instant, but I bit back a scream and ran.

In the gloom everything was grey and uncertain. I skidded in slimy puddles, and debris caught at my ankles, but I stayed on my feet and kept on running. I didn't know where to – I just wanted to throw the cell into a canal then find a place to hide, somewhere far from corrosion and the promise of violence.

Ahead, a wood-and-scaffolding bridge sloped from the shelf lip down to a lit opening in a building front. I was half way across when the entire structure jerked and shook. I slowed just enough to glance back and recognize the grinning figure clambering over the rusted rail. Boosted by terror I dashed to the end of the bridge.

Three strides beyond it my feet were knocked from under me. The cell flew from my hands as I reached out to break my fall. I hit, rolled, came to rest against a wall with pain pulsing in my left shoulder and a sob of fear and hurt threatening to burst in my throat.

"Somehow, I knew you were gonnae do that."

Jacky came into my line of sight. The flak jacket hung torn and open, exposing a bare chest as gashed and lacerated as his arms. He bent to snatch up a small object, rounded and metallic, then regarded me.

"I'm going to kill you," he said happily, "and take your... your fingers back to show your boyfriend -"

There was a click, a tiny, innocent sound, and the cell sprayed something almost invisible into Jacky's face.

Immediately he caught his breath and leaped backwards, away from the already-settling vapour, hand still gripping the cell, eyes tightly closed. I watched him stand that way, immobile for long, long seconds. Then suddenly he let his breath out, gasping, laughing a dry, terrible laugh. He swayed, shook his head as if in denial, and lurched in my direction. My arms and legs felt weak and shivery as I retreated, crawling on my side. But he staggered up against the brick wall, almost clung to it, and I saw that his eyes had turned pale grey. His lips moved, trying to form words. The hand which held the cell shuddered and jerked at his side. He raised it, began beating it against the bricks. On the fourth impact his fist shattered.

His breathing was an agonized wheezing and the air tasted of rust and death. Leaning away from the wall, he managed a few steps before one leg gave way with a brittle splintering and he fell to his knees, trembling all over. The handless wrist bled dust and chips of bone. I watched him open his mouth wide as if to cry out but the skin split and the jaw fell off in a cascade of powdery fragments. I screamed then, as he toppled forwards to smash his face on the ground. He was dead, I knew he was, yet his form twitched and shifted and made a dry rustling which faded as the body gradually grew still, inanimate.

Scared to move my limbs, I could only stare, and for a moment or two nothing disturbed the ghastly tableau. Then there were footsteps. Steve.

He was bloody and battered and his right arm swung uselessly at his side as he limped across the floor.

"He's -" I began.

"I know," he said. He gazed at the dessicated corpse for a second, then went over to crouch by the wall. Gingerly, he reached down and picked up the cell. Something glittering and spidery fell back into the dust and detritus. I watched him turn the grey egg in his fingers, examining it, and I remembered holding it in my own hands, carrying it in my pack, accepting it from Myron.

Nightmares, miracles, new monsters.

"Radio signal trigger," Steve said, "Logos' people will be here soon... trace on it..."

His hand closed around the cell, squeezing so tight his fist trembled. Yet his face was haggard and heavy-eyed.

"Put the thing down, Steve. Please."

He stood up. "Think it's over? Not yet. No, not yet." They were purposeful words but I heard something wounded and hopeless in his voice. "I can do it, Emma. I know I can. Just have to get outside their range, get time to work on it..."

Without finishing the sentence, without looking at me at all, he whirled away and was gone, off into the dead city darkness. I struggled to my feet and followed.



I found him lying curled up in a doorway only metres from a streetcanal.

I don't know what led me there. Perhaps some instinct for flight and evasion asserted itself after the sound of his footsteps faded and I began to feel hunted. Perhaps I was able to track the twists and turns of his despair down desolate alleys and passages. I don't know.

But I found him in that doorway, head bowed, knees drawn up to his chest, hands clenched under his chin. His skin was so dry, so shell-like, and I tried not to imagine him dying that way, tried not to think of metallic implants encased in dust and brittleness. I sat down beside him and soon some people arrived, darkly-clothed men and women. There was an air of inexorable purpose to them and I knew they were from that other London, down from some mirrored tower in the dominion of power and information, come to take whatever they wanted.

They had to break his hand to get at the cell, and when I heard the sound there were already tears on my face but I felt nothing. And as I was taken off to one side, the future opened for me and I saw the expensively decorated rooms where I'd be kept, the expert friends, the expert persuasion, a bright surgery and devices of alloy and plastic being laid down in me like the keel of a new soul. And I felt nothing.

Nothing at all, I told myself.

Michael Cobley makes his first *Interzone* appearance with the above piece. He is already quite well known on the British sf scene, however, with stories in anthologies such as *Other Edens* and small-press magazines such as *R.E.M.* He lives in Glasgow.

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The growling reds of a late spring dawn. The sky inflamed. As Lord Lunn came from the castle keep, sentries dragged themselves to attention. Chilblains on the hands that clasped pikes. A bugle sounded above his head.

Cracking the crisp air, hooves echoed like rat-tats on a snare drum. Crumbling stone caught the noise, multiplied it. Number One groom appeared, leading Stalwart. He bowed when he reached his lord and master. The great horse tossed his head in greeting. Leather and silver were his harness.

Lunn patted the neck of the stallion and walked round him, seeing that all was in order for the journey. Here stood the only living thing he trusted. He tightened the girth running under the barrel of belly. When his inspection was complete, he set foot to stirrup and swung himself into the saddle.

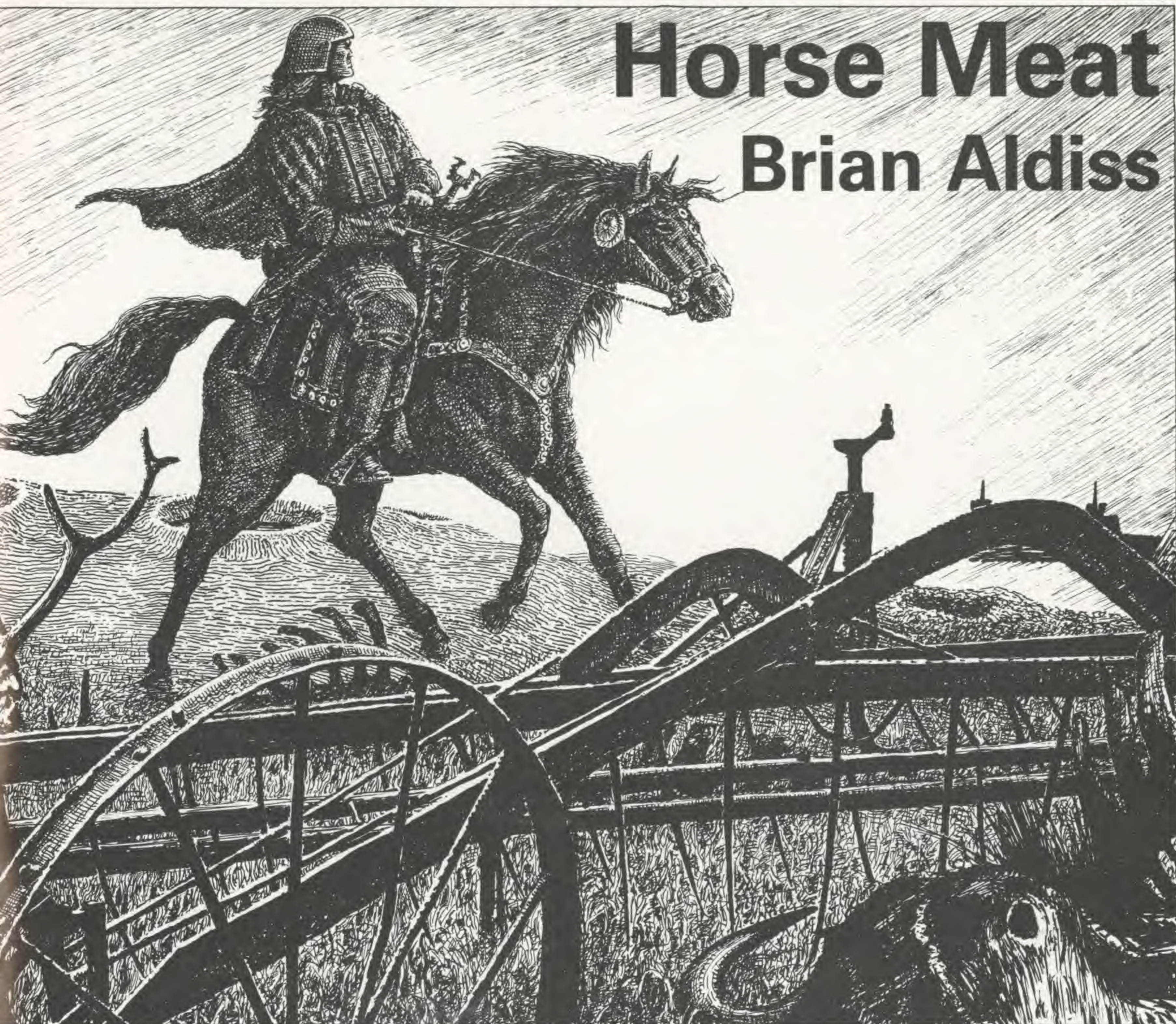
As he did so, Lord Lunn permitted himself a brief glance upwards under a shaggy eyebrow. His current woman was at a high window. She stared down at him. In an instant, he had read the puny manuscript of her face. Despair, hope, in oval shape. She did not

wave. He had offered no farewell. He had not told her where he was going. She would wait. Perhaps she would try to escape. In which case, she would die when he returned. Whatever happened it was a matter of indifference to him. A woman was not like a horse. Horses were hard to find.

No change touched Lunn's frozen expression as he rode forth. He was a big-boned man, spare of flesh. His unkempt hair caught something of the blackness of his stallion's mane. Vigour more than youth salted his vulpine look; under his leather helmet was more than a hint of wolf. Hollows flickered along jawline and at temples. Some accounted him handsome. To smile was no part of his make-up. His philosophy had been pared to a bone of three words: It is written. A bone without meat.

The groom stood away. Lunn passed under the broken outer gate of Ensai Castle. A portrait of the Beloved Helmsman hung there. The high forehead, the heavy moustache, were touched by damp sunlight. Lunn averted his gaze.

An escort of armed men waited for him. They came



Horse Meat

Brian Aldiss

to attention when their lieutenant ordered them. He noted the slovenly way they did so. He did not speak. A toad crouching in a muddy pool augured ill. A soldier's foot crushed it.

Lunn's mood was not to speak. His index finger pointed towards the east. He moved forward along the track in sullen silence. The lieutenant and his troop followed, marching raggedly. A pale ensign trailed a forbidden banner. The lieutenant kept his lips sealed. He had read his lord's bitter look. He understood. Punishment was the castle diet. To live was something: even to live like animals...

This was the domain of the Four Fiefdoms (more officially, the 63rd Administrative District). Flowering plums and buckthorn were shedding late blossom over the road. White petals filled cart-ruts with their snow. Many trees had been broken. Little ground had lately known a hoe. Agricultural machines lay rusting in the fields, by order of the Beloved Helmsman. No one should ever forget that the Revolution was still in progress. The sword,

not the plough, had triumphed. A line of peasant huts fringed a waterway, all deserted. Flies buzzed.

The sky died to dull cloud, without colour or direction.

When Lord Lunn had arrived at Ensai Castle as a callow youth, the first grey blizzards of winter covered lines of corpses. Shut in his room with a portable log-burning stove, he had listened to the wind bearing in from the distant ocean. Invasive wind, hostile to humans, impervious to legislation. It withered the heart. Poems never written defied the blank notebook on his lap. Draughts, soot, spiders, smoke – they fostered no verse.

At night, thinly wrapped, he had prowled the battlements. Vigilance devoured his youth. He had heard ghosts crying. He had heard spectral women sobbing.

In the harlot's foetid chamber, four nails had scratched at the cracked pane. Flowers of frost were scarred.

Now Lunn rode at a good pace towards the river marking the boundary of the Four Fiefdoms, over which he had command. The escorting platoon

followed, bearing its flag. Once, hills had existed. Mountains. All had been blasted away during Operation Rat-Catcher. The river now ran sluggish with its freight of debris, like an old peasant bent by burdens. The land was pocked with pools where radioactivity counts remained high. It was forbidden to measure. Cancerous fish gulped away their lives. Women in rags still gutted and charred them, served them up and ate them. For the poor, the alternative to death was slow death.

Lunn had uncovered the secret history of Operation Rat-Catcher. All history was secret. What was not spoken was forbidden. What was forbidden was not spoken. Had not an earlier Helmsman proposed, Our superior organization will make of the enemy's soil a desert? So it had come about. It was written.

Some day, this Lord of the Four Fiefdoms would use his secret knowledge. He felt the document in his pocket. His annual report was also there. And something else. He ran rough fingers over smooth plastic. Under his bitterness, he told himself, lay a streak of romanticism. Watercress grows in polluted streams. His first kiss. Never to be savoured again. How sweet it had been! How pure!

How much to be loved was the touch of female lips. He kept them with him always, encased in plastic. They would never fade.

By mid-day, the party reached the river and an old ferry. Spilled energy poured from distant sources. Dark waters crackled against reeds parading the nearer bank. Something dived away from their company.

This was the border of his domain. A small band of men had made a stand here once, and been slaughtered. Their deaths stained the atmosphere like an incriminating patch on a blanket, hard to erase.

Stalwart stood easy as Lunn dismounted. The magnificent stallion, twenty-one hands high, needed no restraint. It contemplated the gurgitation of water with its vivid black gaze. As the river with its rushes, so its eye was fringed with lashes.

Lunn addressed his lieutenant. He announced he would progress alone in the administrative district across the water. His preference was not to be accompanied by such slipshod men. The soldiery must now return under a sergeant's command to their barracks in the castle. The lieutenant must remain alone at the ferry, to await Lunn's return.

Crestfallen, the lieutenant received his orders. He dared ask no question. There was nothing at the ferry. He might starve before his ruler returned. He saluted. Hand quivered at forehead.

The boatman approached hurriedly from his shack. An unshaven skeletal figure which scratched at an armpit. He presented himself to Lunn. Without hope of remuneration, he dreaded chastisement. He clasped his hands and bowed low. He plied his ferry now for fear, not money. His old grey clothes were torn. Poverty had its uniform. It was more important to starve than offend.

As Lunn led his mount to the water's edge, the ferryman called out in a husky voice.

Whereupon an old woman draped in a tarpaulin appeared from a thicket. She had been cutting wands of willow for a basket. These she dropped in her haste.

Doubled with age, she ran across muddy ground to the boat. The curses of the ferryman encouraged her.

This scuttling black form annoyed the lord. He drove his stallion forward. The woman staggered hurriedly out of its way. Her eyes were cinders in her age-scarred face. The boat rocked as Stalwart went aboard, its planks resounding in protest at the animal's shod weight.

Fearful of delay, the ferryman pushed his ferry out into the flood. As the water lapped about his thighs, he threw himself aboard. He stood erect to row in the stern. The old woman did likewise in the low prow. He continued to shout angry commands at her. The craft was ensnared in whorls of dirty silk. Many had drowned in this river, some by design.

Both shores were desolate. Signs of long-abandoned industry drifted by. Black flood mirrored black walls. No birds flew.

The old ferryman laboured. The old woman struggled at her oar. To encourage each other, they sang a snatch of elderly song over and over.

Wind in the lower room.

*Between drunk and sober I drifted three days,
Three days.*

Lunn remained silent by his silent horse. He stared down at a silver stirrup. He listened to the repeated words of the song. He remembered his father.

Drifting was but an interlude. The other bank closed in on them. A knot of silver birches clustered together for company. Pines had once flourished until radioactivity killed them. Sheltering under the birches, now in twinkling leaf, was a landing stage and a shed. On the stage a young man stood, waiting. He gave no signal. He was smartly dressed in furs. His legs were slightly apart, his arms akimbo, in a confrontational pose.

This young man permitted his gaze to meet Lord Lunn's as the distance between them dwindled.

The prow jarred against the stage. The old woman scrambled ashore, fumbling with the mooring rope. She secured the boat and stood, bending backwards to ease her spine. Lunn threw her a coin as he disembarked. He led Stalwart from the boat to marshy ground. Stalwart tossed his head, taking the scent of the province. To one of the tree trunks was pinned a poster portrait of the Beloved Helmsman.

Coming forward, the young man in furs bowed low to Lord Lunn. He announced that the Province of Norj was honoured to receive the Ruler of the Four Fiefdoms. He gave his name as Roi Obal. He was a councillor of the City of Norj, in charge of Processing. That city awaited Lord Lunn with impatience to welcome him on his annual visit. So saying, he backed away down the track among the trees, beckoning, beckoning.

The ferryman and the old woman remained by their boat, mouths hanging open. They watched. Then the man crossed and wrenched Lunn's mite from her old fist. She climbed into the boat without protest. Her nose ran. She held her oar upright, using both hands. Behind her, the swirling river, the reeds, the distance.

As fur-clad Councillor Obal progressed backwards, light branches and twigs whipped his face. One cheek bled from a thorn scratch. He kept his gaze fixed on Lunn. Lunn followed him

without speaking. His stallion's head nodded by his shoulder, disdainful.

Obal stopped when he reached the shed. The walls of the shed were weatherworn but almost intact. Tiles had slid from its roof. Broken by their fall, they formed a terracotta path along either side of the building. The councillor pushed open the black-tarred door. He gestured proudly inside. An automobile stood there.

The high-walled sides of the car were ancient. They had been polished. The glass shone. The vehicle was decorated for the occasion. Above its roof had been secured a portrait of the Beloved Helmsman. And beneath the familiar face, a familiar slogan in red: ENEMIES ALL ROUND.

The councillor announced proudly that he would have the honour of driving Lord Lunn to the City of Norj in the vehicle. His horse could be left with the ferryman. His rather cold grey eyes sparkled with pride as he spoke. He was still youthful, somewhat plump of countenance from city living. He had drawn in his stomach to stand rigidly upright.

Lunn made no response.

With increasing anxiety Councillor Obal scrutinized his superior. What he saw there was a tower of pent passion, with a vein that throbbed in his hollow temple. His own face clouded in response. Man and horse stood unmoving and unmoved. Obal stammered part of his welcome again as he sought for approval in the dark visage before him.

The lantern of Lunn's face remained unlit. Without haste, he spoke in his deep voice. He asked firstly why an impudent cityman should believe he would entrust his stallion to a wretched peasant. He said that the Beloved Helmsman – and the Darling Helmsman before him – had condemned all automobiles as foreign inventions, used only by forces of counter-revolution. Had what was written been forgotten?

To suggest that he, Lord of the Four Fiefdoms, should enter the machine was an affront. That affront would be punished.

At these words, Councillor Obal fell to his knees. His former arrogance faded. Claspings his hands together, he babbled for forgiveness. He was a member of an illustrious family. That family would certainly reward the great lord if his error were to be forgiven. He had intended only to honour –

His protestations were cut short. Lunn told him that he would go before a tribunal in Norj. He was ordered to get to his feet and to cease his blubbering. He would follow Lunn on foot, all the way to the gates of Norj, where incarceration awaited him.

As horse and rider moved off, Obal followed, chin down on chest.

To the east lay low hills. From behind these, the sun had risen. Its disc was pale although it had broken clear of the morning mist. Temperatures on this side of the river were generally more clement than in the Four Fiefdoms. Men and animal moved through a decrepit landscape. Fifty thousand square kilometres of the Four Fiefdoms had been affected by Operation Rat-Catcher. The effects had spilled over here, to the Province of Norj. Generations later, nature still convalesced, and would do so until many more generations of men had faded from the Earth.

Hollow, destitute, all about their track stood broken reeds. New green was just beginning to show through

greys and russets of last year. The poison could not be seen or smelt. It was too alien to be detected by human senses.

Horse and rider and following prisoner moved through the afternoon. From tall grasses the wind gathered a rustling skirt. The travellers met with no one on their way. Once, a man was seen fishing in a distant pond, a grey shape curving towards grey water.

Nearer evening colder breezes riffled the vegetation. Lunn rode Stalwart to a stream and allowed it to drink while toads croaked disapproval. Tethering his mount to a lone tree, he seated himself with the tree trunk at his back, its bark at his spine. He ate sparingly of dry rations. Councillor Obal stood nearby, afraid to move until given permission. He dared not ask for food or drink. The order came to sit. He sprawled among long grass. Forehead on hands, he stared downwards into the earth.

Dusk wrapped them in its grey twilight. Minutes wasted away. Lunn ordered his captive to recite poetry. Roi Obal cleared his throat and declaimed in a singsong voice:

*By rivers and lakes at odds with life I journeyed
Until the Beloved Helmsman directed me.*

Now life's an ocean of understanding.

To every lock he is the key.

The councillor's voice trailed away. His recitation met with no response. He made bold to explain. "The verse, honoured sir, is from the opera 'The De-Electrification of Northern Countries'."

Lunn made no answer. He despised cheap propagandist verse. His taste was for classical poetry. He closed his eyes.

The rushes never ceased to shiver in the breeze: they spoke like dried mouths. Dull night brought with it only a handful of stars. The river made its own noise, enfolding itself. Leaves were borne away by the stream. So it had always been. It was written.

Obal's eyes remained wide. On the jade wheel of night, where the black stallion watched, the smallest hour chimed. Lunn did not move beneath his bare tree. The councillor rose to his feet. His breath scarcely dared leave his chest. He took one step, then another. Under his boots dead stalks crackled. The figure propped beneath the tree gave no sign. Another pace Obal took, another, and another. He began to run.

The voice of Lunn behind him was scarcely raised. It merely ordered him to come back. Councillor Obal ran the faster. No sounds of pursuit reached him. All he could hear was the beat of his own heart and the pulse of liberty in his head. With hands stretched out before him, he rushed through the blind night. Every forced footfall took him nearer freedom.

For nearly an hour he ran. He was forced to pause and folded up to regain his breath.

In Norj, he lived alone in conditions of austerity. The view from his lonely window of an echoing prison yard accorded with a certain bleakness in his soul. Yet his family wished only to pamper him. Because Roi Obal's duties in the city were important, that powerful family would not let him go: daily deliveries of forbidden luxuries testified to his parents' possessive love. When not sick at heart, he consumed the delicacies.

Those delicacies weighed on him now in the middle of nowhere. He bent double, gasping, his stomach touched his thighs.

He heard the drumming. It seemed to be in his veins. Anxiously, he straightened up.

Then above him – a great shadow, inky, terrifying, imminent. Obal was struck before he knew it. A boot was in his face, breaking it.

Under the force of the blow he tumbled and tumbled. A bundle of old rags knew more resistance.

When the rider on his stallion rode back to the lone tree, Roi Obal dragged himself to his feet and followed.

Before the midday hour next arrived, Lord Lunn rode into the City of Norj on his black stallion. Norj was one of the great provincial capitals of administrative power. Its suburbs covered many square kilometres of the plain and climbed hills. The river that ran beneath its bridges was gnarled with veins of history. At the city's ancient heart were many fine buildings, their matt surfaces closed to the street. No building was permitted to be built more than four stories high. The great stone statue of the Beloved Helmsman, standing in Central Place, was five stories high. The eyes of the Beloved Helmsman lit at night – dimly, to conserve electricity.

Behind Lunn over the cobbles staggered his bloody-faced captive, Roi Obal. Obal was handed to the police and a charge made. He was dragged without argument into a cell: just to be accused by the ruler of the Four Fiefdoms was sufficient indication of guilt. Obal lay where he was thrown, shouting angrily that his family would rescue him. The door slammed on his cries.

Lunn proceeded to the great official building where the General Secretary of the Revolutionary Party of the Province resided. Ordinary citizens passed the establishment with dread. He saw to it that Stalwart was comfortably stabled before he went to the residential section. His customary annual quarters were ready. There he luxuriated in scented waters before being ushered into a room lined with rich carpets.

Three men awaited Lunn in the room. One was dressed in black. The black-robed one greeted Lord Lunn in the name of the Beloved Helmsman.

Lunn produced from a pouch a C-wand, thin as a pencil. The black-robed man, General Secretary Cooth, accepted it, and crossed to where a silken curtain closed off a corner of the room. When Cooth pulled aside the curtain, a dull brown box was revealed. Cooth switched it on and inserted the C-wand in its slot. This was Old Red Eyes. Since the punitive but poorly observed laws against machines were imposed by the previous Helmsman, computers had been reclassified as agricultural implements.

The screen lit. Shining in scarlet, figures unrolled. These were the accountings compiled by Lunn's clerks. The columns showed production yields over the past year in the Four Fiefdoms, for timber, sorghum, reeds, fish, meat, skins, and so on. All figures were exaggerated. When blended with other figures, they would be exaggerated again. Only then could they be despatched to the capital. Norms had to be met – and exceeded. Or unpleasant questions would be asked.

Next came listings of political and ordinary criminals punished under various sections of the law: those who had lost heads or hands. Thieves, loyalty-flouters, questioners, and others – all had met with justice and found its blade sharp. These figures, reported to Lord Lunn in Ensai Castle from his fiefdoms, had been exaggerated. His clerks had exaggerated them again. They would again be exaggerated before despatch onward to the state capital.

The scarlet letters drained away, the screen dulled. The curtain was drawn back into place. Old Red Eyes slept. In the carpeted room, the four men seated themselves at a marble table and conversed in low voices. On the table top were incised cryptograms of admonition. The four spoke elliptically, each concerned with his own survival, with law, with betrayal. The name of the Beloved Helmsman surfaced often on their bearded lips, but the left side of their faces spoke only oppression. Sometimes, one of them, whispering of some new decision from the national capital, would trace idly with a forefinger the ideogram for Severity or Deception. Outside, it was dark or light.

Their business concluded, they retired to a yet stuffer room. Faded green silks, imperceptibly moving, gave a sigh. Otherwise, sound was sponged up by fabric. Brass drinking cups stood against a sandalwood wall. Servants were summoned, entering on their knees. Pipes were distributed. Harlots sucked the pipes alight with their lower parts. Smoke rose like serpents crawling towards invisibility. Later, a gong, a meal of many courses. Music, a woman danced, masked, with shaven crotch. Beaks dangling from immense assiettes, marinated vultures were served, bedded on the tripe of infant sows. The four men ate. Bones crunched between their gold-lagged teeth.

Their eyebrows gathered in knots in the middle of their foreheads as they filled their bellies.

In the stables, Stalwart's oats were moistened with ale, cream, and the semen of tame cheetahs.

Councillor Roi Obal enjoyed no such feast. He was marched before a drumhead tribunal. Limbs trembling with fury, he was forced to plead guilty to charges of loyalty-flouting and technology-roading. His judges wore metal caps. The sentence was death. Justice came and went by the tick of the clock.

Obal expected nothing else. The tribunal had norms to fulfil. He well understood the system. Until yesterday, he had been a part of it. And his past services were indeed acknowledged by the tribunal: his private parts would be severed and despatched to his family – after death, not before.

In forgotten times past, the Glory of November the First Corrective Wing had been the city's main art gallery and museum. In some of the more remote galleries, canvases still hung on the walls. Such galleries were closed, unlit, damp. Portraits of the illustrious dead suffered a double death. Their eyes had been shot out, mouths blacked in. All who had professed or achieved anything of merit had been profaned. The Beloved Helmsman disliked comparisons. Art was disloyalty. Artistry was escape-seeking. The reward was loss of vision. It was written.

Councillor Obal was kicked into the Mauve Room.

Once mauve, now prison-coloured. Stink emanated from other prisoners already confined, from walls, floor, bunks, lice. Obal choked. He stood against the door, hearing the sentry slam the bolts on the other side. He could not believe he was here, seeing what he saw.

Light filtered from a small barred window overhead. Beads of condensation dripped down from it with labial whispers.

The nauseous smell pressed against his face and eyeballs, so that he could hardly see. The prison cell was lined with bunks, on which prisoners lay two or even three to a bunk. Men and women were mixed indiscriminately. Anguish distorted their postures. It was as if they had studied exaggerated pictures of misery and imitated the gestures of its victims. Their faces were white, twisted as though made from pastry. Many stretched their arms above their heads, entwining the bony things as if on a rack. Some had involuntarily released their bowels inside their clothes. The diarrhoeas of terror seeped from them. Small patty-puddles accrued on the floor, green as the meconia of new-born infants.

These denizens of the pit cast glances at Obal, then rolled their distended gaze away, distraught with their own predicaments. From them came a perpetual moan and whine, as of wind flowing about a pillaged hamlet.

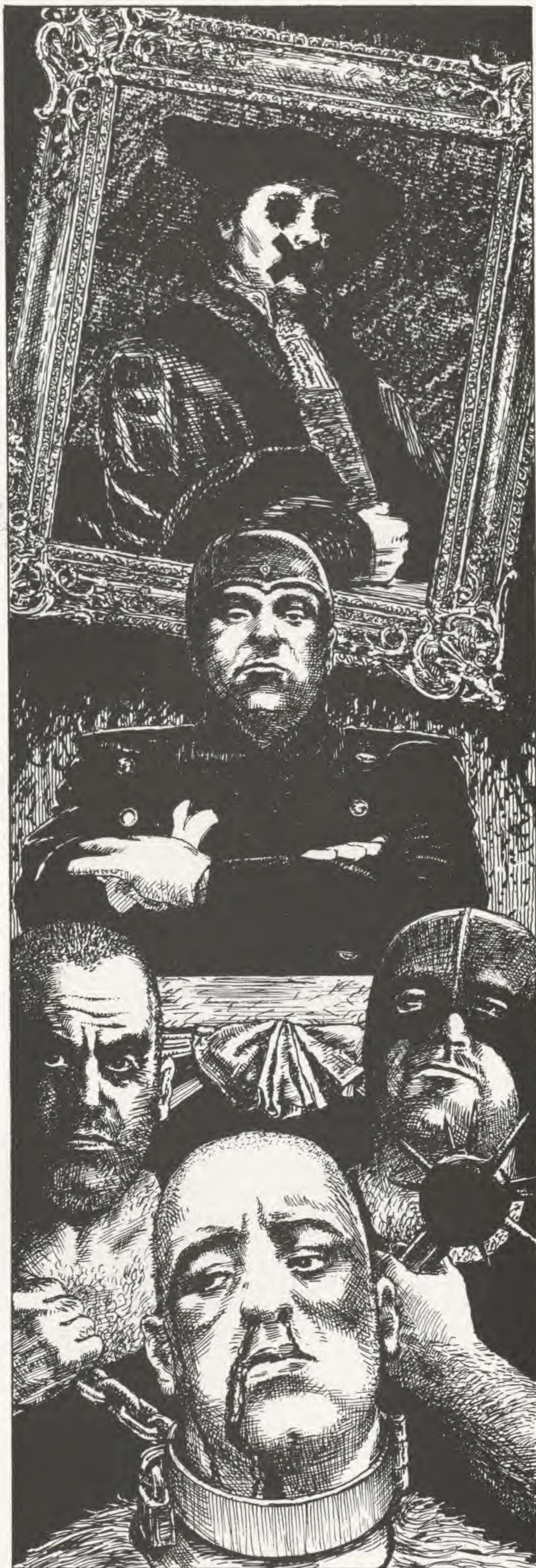
Obal leaned against the door. He filtered the foul air through his hand. A second door stood at the far end of the den. Those incarcerated stayed as far from it as possible. When heavy footsteps were heard, this second door was kicked open. Two guards rushed shouting into the cell. It was as if two dogs had been let in. Behind them could be glimpsed a hallway with a stair spiralling down into the cellars of the building. Up the stairwell filtered light and shadows, together with fresh scents of evil.

These mad dogs were armed. Otherwise, they appeared as unkempt as the prisoners. At their entry, the wind over the pillaged hamlet increased in volume. The soldiers were in great haste. Their mad activity contrasted with the apathy of their prisoners.

At random, they grabbed five of the men and one woman, pulling them from their bunks. They yelled savagely that they wanted no trouble, no delay. One of the five men, a youngster with a blonde flowing moustache, screamed he would serve the Beloved Helmsman till the last. He offered to betray everyone he knew in exchange for an hour more of life. He received such a blow on the mouth that blood immediately dyed his moustache.

The would-be betrayer was barely out of his teens. The cell also contained old men, some as derelict as scarecrows. Old women, too. Young or old, innocent or villainous, rich or poor, those who owned estates or those who were beggars, literate or illiterate, ugly or handsome, betrayers or betrayed – eventually the whole spectrum of society went through the mincer of the Glory of the First of November Corrective Wing into the obscurity of death.

Some of those confined wept and sucked their thumbs, coiled in foetal positions. Others presented a stoic countenance, or spat at the soldiery when they came near. There were those, when the soldiers dragged them out, who swore, those who begged, and



those – women especially – who prayed to gods long officially forgotten. One old fellow, almost toothless, called cheerfully to the guards that he wanted his breakfast before he was shot.

The selected six were ordered to strip. Their clumsy fingers, shaking hands, began tearing at knots, buckles, buttons. Each victim was anxious not to be first to stand shivering naked before their captors. In an equal terror, the soldiers responded to yells from a superior below stairs. "Coming, coming!" they yapped.

They rushed here and there like savage dogs, tearing at clothes, striking out, shouting incoherently.

At last their six victims were reduced to nudity, to stand with bare feet on the beslimed floor. Their knees knocked. They clutched their bundles of soiled clothing. Only the woman and one of the men endeavoured to cover their pallid genitalia. The others had lost their shame in the face of imminent death. One and all, they were pulled, dragged, and kicked through the far door. Once they were stumbling down the stairs to the cellar, the door slammed and was bolted again after them.

All those remaining in the cell gasped with relief that this time they had been spared. Most sat up. Some hugged their neighbours. They listened.

Their eyeballs stared out at nothing. Their mouths hung open.

Many shuddered uncontrollably.

Somewhere below the cell, shots sounded.

The firing echoed up from the intestines of a gigantic stone animal. Once the animal had been a place of culture. What was fine had once been preserved. Ordinary people had admired here, had spoken of the arts of harmony and perspective. Then human history had again taken an ill turn.

All that had previously been valued or held up for admiration was desecrated. Everything beautiful was condemned. The stone animal had shrugged its heavy shoulders. Its name was Revolution and it had awoken hungry for prey. It was without conscience. It could not smell innocence. It devoured people. The shots from the cellars signified the sound of its feasting.

The prisoners groaned and slumped down on their bunks.

Obal knew what happened next. Below, in the ill-lit dark, insane activity marked the animal's digestive process. He could picture it all. He could not bar the pictures from his brain. In the deep cellar, which was L-shaped, the executioners would be half-drunk. Otherwise, they would have blown their own brains out. There would be a stench of cordite and fresh meat.

After each round of executions, blood would flow from the newly dead as other prisoners tied ropes round their feet. Earth would be strewn on the cellar floor to mop up brains and gore. The bones of the living prisoners would rattle with leukaemias of disgust at their task.

Next, a gang of prisoners above ground would be surrounded by armed guards. This gang would haul the corpses up from the cellar to the light. The duty of this gang was to pile the dead into carts. With a heave, up went another body, swung like a bolster. The faces of the corpse gang would be as greasy white as the faces of the murdered.

The carts would always be over-loaded.

The gang would be made to climb up and trample down the corpses, the still-warm gristle, underfoot. Somehow, more bodies would be pressed in. All this would be done in insane haste, amid curses and blows. Always the insane haste of men burning out their nerves, of men to whom carrion was their bread and butter.

Then oxen with bones sticking from their rumps like propellers would be lashed into action. More curses. The carts would begin to roll towards death pits outside the city. Terrible clotted liquors would slink down the sides of the carts to clog the dust of the road.

The carts would work day and night, carrying away the stinking meat, the by-product of the Revolution.

Some of the living, whose dwellings lined the route to the mass graves, would peer out to see the dreadful journeys. Their stale breath misted their window panes, where window panes existed. They would utter in terror the name of the Beloved Helmsman, for whom the living died and the dead lived.

All this dreadful organization, which continued day and night, year after year, this violation of human existence, was the practical result of the Golden Meditations of various Helmsmen: the world made despoiled flesh, the intellect rendered into madness.

This whole process, horrible but banal, a criminality in which all of society conspired, fried like pig fat in Obal's brain.

He stood in the cell transfixed. He knew it all because he had been one of the directors of the corrective process. As youngest councillor, his had been the task of attending to letters of betrayal or whispers of anti-revolutionary thought. Often enough, both betrayers and betrayed were imprisoned together, tried together, and destroyed together. There was justice for you! Obal had seen to it that the norms were fulfilled, that shots always sounded in the reeking cellar, that the carts were despatched punctually on their journey to the death pits.

He had never questioned anything. Loyalty had been his life. He had been possessed by total loyalty to the Beloved Helmsman. Thus he had been brought up, educated, and trained. Every day of his life, kept apart from his family, he had been schooled in the grim routines of continual Revolution.

His superiors, fearing this intense young man more every year, had eventually rewarded him.

Obal's reward had been to greet Lord Lunn at the ferry, to escort him to the City of Norj. Obal had accepted the honour as such – not joyfully, for he knew not joy. At this moment, when the mouths of the dying in the cellar below his feet were stifled with blood, Obal perceived how his superiors had betrayed him. They had known that Lord Lunn, wed to his black stallion, would see in the automobile evidence of technology-roading. They had recognized Obal's sincerity and planned his downfall accordingly. Those who fuelled the Revolution feared sincerity. Sincerity had loyalty-flouting potential. Sincerity shamed them. So they had plotted this devious way to remove him.

Only now did Obal's narrow young mind open enough to admit the betrayal. He understood in the same moment that betrayal was no unusual thing: no secret, no particular spite, no blemish in a just system.

It formed, rather, a basic principle by which the Revolution was continued and the state was governed. Only through betrayal as a commandment could one of the largest nations in the world remain eternally subject to fear.

These thoughts crawled like white worms through his skull, as if he were already dead.

Something burst in his head, his throat, his heart.

He began to shout. He filled the cell with his voice.

"God curse the Revolution! God curse the Four Obligations! God curse everything that makes us live lives of shit and misery! Fellow sufferers, rise from your bunks! Let's at least die like honourable men and women!"

Some prisoners turned their heads to glare at him. One lanky yellow fellow called to him to shut up. Obal shouted the more, running among them, striking their bunks with his clenched fists.

A blousy woman with tangled hair, whose left eye had been blackened by a blow, slid from her bunk to stand on her own two feet. She raised a fist. She showed her teeth in a growl.

"I'm with you, mate! You're right. Let's fight the bastards, kick their balls in. What have we got to lose?"

Obal could have embraced her. But others cringed away or shouted to Obal and the woman to be quiet.

The yellow man screamed at him. "Shut your gob, you cunt, or we'll be in trouble!"

"God curse the Beloved Helmsman!" shouted Obal, goaded to fresh fury at their cowardice. "Curse the rotten old bastard, with his fat gut and his privileges! Death to the fucking Helmsman!"

It was too much for the majority of prisoners. Even in their weakened state, they could not bear this blasphemy. They climbed to the floor and threw themselves at Obal. Fists flew. Obal slipped to the ground. The others piled on him, snarling and kicking like beasts.

In burst the guards from below. They swung about them with rifle butts. Half-a-dozen more prisoners were hauled off to the cellar, snivelling for mercy. The yellow man was one of them. In a minute, the next round of executions took place.

The survivors fell silent at the sound of firing. They knew they had only minutes or hours to live. Obal sat in a corner to nurse his bruises.

He discovered he was pissing himself. The sensation brought sullen delight. All political doctrine washed from his body with the warm flow of urine. He was now merely animal. He was now free.

With that reflection came regret. The regret choked him, moving through his veins like poison, obliterating the bruises. He regretted that he had never enjoyed a woman. His dedication had over-ridden the need for women.

Later, later, he told himself, whenever a whisper of sexual hunger had stirred. Later! Now it was too late. Peering about under his brows, he looked for the blousy woman who had supported his brief defiance.

I'll screw her, he told himself. Why not? I'll screw her. Yes, in front of all these miserable cowards, I'll screw her rotten. Here on the floor, among the slime and piss. I know she'll like it. She has that look. I'll slip it right up her hairy hole. A mile up.

But the woman had already been dragged down to the stone cellar. Her body was already cooling meat, dragged by ropes up to the charnel carts.

Golden haze had settled on the room. Lord Lunn idled in luxury with his associates. Handmaidens washed his feet with potassium permanganate. Subdued music played. At one end of the cushioned chamber, an old reader in a red gown recited from the Book of the Helmsman's Golden Meditations. The Meditations rested on a carved lectern, which the reader clutched with both hands as he read.

The enemy will not perish of himself. Our superior organization will turn the enemy's soil into desert, so that he cannot live. There his bones will lie.

But bones can be reborn. That is why we need to create of our whole society a desert. Men see further where ground is flat.

We must starve. The Revolution is not a dinner party. It cannot be refined, temperate, restrained. A revolution is an act of violence.

Violence is necessary for hygiene. Continuous violence is necessary for health. "Justice" is a class-word. Hiding behind the disgusting term, our real enemies can pretend to be our real friends.

We shall have no real friends until all attitudes towards the Revolution are positively united in the one single aim: Equality!

The old reader read quietly, so that his words were not distinctly heard by his superiors at the other end of the chamber.

Among those superiors, wine was being passed again. They were drinking the dark red wine of Perigord Noir. A messenger was announced. He entered and bowed before Lord Lunn in a manner many times denounced as counter-revolutionary, yet still practised, often enforced.

The messenger handed to Lord Lunn a gift wrapped in layers of yellow muslin. He bowed and departed.

With a negligent air, Lord Lunn unwrapped the gift. The muslin parted. At its heart lay a delicate porcelain porringer. The porringer consisted of three parts, a two-handled cup, a stand, a saucer. Floral decoration had been artistically applied. The expert eye of the lord read the maker's marks on the base of the saucer. This was a porringer made in Derby in 1781 according to the old calendar dating. It was beautiful and rare. And of course dangerous, because technology-roading, equality-flouting, and decidedly counter-revolutionary.

Lord Lunn held the porringer up to the light to admire its translucence.

A sliver of paper floated from the cup. He scooped it up from the ground. The paper was decorated and perfumed. Such notepaper wanton young women had used before the Helmsmen had come to reshape the world into a better place. On the paper, a female hand had written a verse:

*Four turns of the street and a brass rail
Lead you to my room and inner chamber.
Who can tell what joys will prevail
When you and yours pierce the silk lining.*

Every line of the verse spoke of a refinement, a decadence now almost stamped out. Lunn appreciated that it was written after the manner of a Tang poet, and immediately decoded its erotic message. He became erect with lust. Whoever composed the verse was in need of a firm bridle when mounted. He decided to respond immediately. Besides, the company of the General Secretary vexed him.

Taking up the delicate porringer, he excused himself and climbed the stairs to the suite of rooms provided for him. There he summoned a servant to lave him and perfume his body. Other servants were directed on other errands. He assumed a rich gown. He pomaded his hair, which he drew together into two plaits. These he tied so that they rested on his chest.

When he went down to the courtyard, a groom was bringing forth his stallion from the stabling block.

The lord fondled Stalwart's muzzle and kissed his arched neck. "Soon, soon, my beauty," he whispered. The stallion gave a shudder like a child sighing, and fixed his master with a dark gaze. Lunn ordered the groom to wait: he would go out alone and on foot. He was aware that verse and porringer were possibly a trap, and that danger might await him. But for danger he was always prepared.

The day was sickening towards sunset. He left the precincts of the General Secretary's establishment and marched down the highway. In such a reactionary verse as he had been sent, "four turns of the street" would have to mean right turns. Most of the houses he passed were of local stone, blotches of lichen giving them a porous appearance, as though all the dying day were being absorbed into the granite. When he took the fourth turn, he saw ahead of him a mansion with a gleaming brass rail. The rail twisted up three steps to an archway.

He paused and looked about him. There was little life in Norj. The time for curfew approached and few people were about. Owing to power restrictions, no lights showed. Grasping the rail, he mounted the steps and passed through the archway.

In the grounds he entered stood a large house. It did not share the tumbledown air which characterized most of its neighbours. He was challenged by two armed guards. When he gave his name, he was told he was expected.

The mansion confronted the visitor with a heavy stone frontage. Its windows were narrow and shuttered within. Without, their sills jutted like chins. A hound barked warningly as the door opened and he was shown into a long dark hall.

A house servant bearing an oil lamp ushered him along. The tongue of flame cast blurred reflections in polished panelling. They reached a rear room. Lunn stood alertly, for the room was almost totally dark. A voice bade him be seated. He remained standing. The fragrances of the room assailed his nostrils. There came the noise of panting, as of someone being half-strangled.

Electric light suddenly invaded the room with its brilliance. Lunn found himself in surroundings of some perversity.

Elaborate dispositions of furniture challenged the visitor. The salon had been partitioned into a series of niches, each variously hung and carpeted so as to clash with each other, as if to conjure different moods. However, a predominant colour was burnt orange, which seemed to absorb shadows. The walls had not been permitted to go naked; they were adorned with drawings, watercolours and calligraphic poems, some in 3D. "The Enemy" and "Lovers' Death" were two of the poetic titles which caught Lord Lunn's eye. Pinned up in the alcoves were skins of leopard, coyote, and other rare animals.

"Cinnabar and lacquer green are the preferred colours for those of refined visual taste, as you might agree, since the refinement of your tastes is suggested – in strict contrast, if I may say so, to your appearance – by your precipitate arrival here in pursuit of what? ... a fragment of verse." Such was the sentence of welcome uttered by a man who now appeared before Lunn from one of the alcoves rather as if he were performing a conjuring trick on himself.

"Not the verse but its author drew me here," Lunn replied, ironing out his frown.

He found himself confronting a man of medium height dressed in fine lacquer-green decorated brocade and restraining by a gold leash a dog of apparent hostile intent. The panting he heard issued from the dog's throat.

"The blustering, swaggering kind of men, your go-getters, even your plethoric types who join various societies – these tend to prefer startling tones of reds and yellows. Where does your preference lie, may I enquire?" The speaker had perhaps attained his fifties. He evinced a tendency towards dryness. With his sensitive features went sparse hair. His slender hands clutched the leash which restrained his dog. The dog was brindle, with heavy shoulders and a wide mouth. It slobbered in its eagerness to approach Lord Lunn.

"I'm well content with red. The more vivid the better."

"No doubt in the Four Fiefdoms one yearns for what might be termed 'a good old vivid red' ..." He accompanied this remark with a bark of amusement.

"That one does, sir, certainly. Just as one yearns for straightforward discourse."

The point was received with a gracious nod. The green-clad host, speaking in the mellowest of voices, expressed his gratitude to Lord Lunn for visiting what he described as his meagre dwelling. Both he and his family also appreciated the honour their visitor had done them by deigning to take notice of one of their number – a remark which passed over Lunn's head. He simply stood there on pile carpet and waited without responding, containing his anger.

The host's remark had evidently served as a signal. From behind an ornate screen concealing one of the alcoves came the family. The host's brother was followed by two sons and a wife, in that order. Each entered the body of the room with a gift which they set at Lord Lunn's feet. Each made a formal bow. Each expressed delight at seeing him in their home.

To this barrage of courtesy, Lunn made no response. No civility of a name had been proffered him, although it was clear the brocade-clad host knew his name. Lunn stood where he was, legs apart, one hand on his belt close to the hilt of his sword. He scowled into the smiling faces before him.

To discover in this room every evidence of discriminating taste and a connoisseur's delight in fine objects did not surprise him. Despite the century of revolution and the depredations of more than one Helmsman, such anomalies still existed. In his own ruinous castle, he stored many precious books and manuscripts of ancient date, together with maps of the world as it had been. What surprised him was that he, a stranger with power, should be permitted to

witness this display of counter-revolutionary wealth. Still he spoke no word.

His host offered him tea or other refreshment. Lunn shook his head.

"Tell me who you are. Or does such indiscretion offend your sensibilities?"

With a delicate smile on his lips, his host replied, "Honoured sir, standing admiringly before you is none other than the Family Obal. My name, which I trust you will find acceptable, is Eric Obal. Our delight in receiving you here knows no bounds. You are already acquainted with our son, Roi Obal. Roi met you at the ferry and escorted you to Norj. Of course we do not expect you to remember so insignificant an event. But believe me, it was a privilege for us all."

The rest of the family clapped. Then silence fell. All looked politely at Lord Lunn.

"Well?" demanded Lord Lunn.

In no way altering his courteous purring tone, Eric Obal asked, "Do you consider, sir, that a man is a sewer?"

"Some men are worse than sewers." But he had paused. The question took him unawares.

"Is not one characteristic the same for all men, to whatsoever station of life born – that wholesome things go into their mouths while filth spurts from their lower parts?"

The question was lightly asked. As if he had scored a point by it, Eric Obal turned and sat in a chair. He still restrained the dog. His wife moved to stand behind his chair. Both smiled up at Lunn, awaiting his answer.

"What of it if that is so?" Lunn asked.

"There is hardly an 'if', sir, since is not what I say the truth?"

"I'll grant you men are sewers if you care to think in such terms. What follows?"

Eric Obal nodded, still smiling. The dog panted at his feet. "If you grant men are sewers, are they then only sewers? Is life a disease?"

"Do you presume to give me an anatomy lesson?"

"Would you not say that men are sewers, but nevertheless have a kind of sacred spirit imprisoned among the filth?"

Impatiently, Lunn said, "Some, no doubt, some are as you say. Religion means nothing to me. Now, have done with your sophistry and come to the point. I believe you have a daughter, a versifier, who wrote to me. Where is she? Why does she not appear?"

"Speaking of the female sex, honoured sir, I once encountered a man who said to me – this was in another town – that when a man kisses a woman he is kissing one end of a tube ten metres long, half-filled with excrement. Would you consider that man to be a liar, a philosopher, or a misogynist?"

"Has not a man – to those who wish to think that way – also a tube just as long, and just as full of excrement? Any man who spoke like your friend would be a woman-hater, in my judgement."

A silence fell, hard and crisp as January frost. Lunn kept his gaze fixed on the delicate man in lacquer green, awaiting the next bizarre question. He had a horror of this conversation and was aware of the fixed smiles of the other members of the Obal family.

"You think well of kissing, then, sir?"

"As well as any man," said Lunn.



Again silence filled the cinnabar and lacquer green room.

"You have said that men are like sewers. You have said that men are half-full of excrement. All of us in this room heard your words. Do you mean your remarks to apply also to our Beloved Helmsman?"

"Our Beloved Helmsman, sir, is above such slander and such sophistry. He is a god."

"You deny his humanity?"

"I deny your right to question me further. It is within my power to have the whole bunch of you arrested for disloyal thought and behaviour."

Eric Obal raised a finger to his lips. "Choose your words with care, my lord, or the armed servants waiting beyond the door will hear you and grow angry."

His wife spoke in her sweet voice. "Would you care for a sugar plum to calm you, sir?" She accompanied her words with a gesture towards a bowl of the fruits standing on a side-table.

Lunn addressed her with controlled courtesy. "I am calm, thank you, madam. Porcelain brought me here. It is preferable to broken glass. Do you wish me to leave here and report the counter-revolutionary lifestyle in which you indulge?"

Eric Obal glanced slyly down at the dog waiting by his feet. "Oh, no, sir, Brindle, unfortunately, would not allow you to leave this room alive. I would be loth to see my Persian carpets smeared with blood – even such illustrious blood as yours."

"Don't speak of blood to me, or we'll take a look at yours between us. What do you want of me? Say! Have finished with this small talk of yours."

"Oh, no. It is very large talk, sir." His look was unexpectedly challenging. "It touches on both my son, Roi Obal, at present enjoying the hospitality of one of the city's prisons, and on my young virginal daughter, Caraway."

"Who's this?"

"Roi you have met; Caraway you have yet to meet."

It was clear they were now coming to a crucial part of the meeting. Eric Obal exchanged a glance with his wife, whereupon the lady rose and approached Lord Lunn. Putting forth a dainty hand, she said in clear tones, "Honoured sir, let us continue this pleasant conversation outside, you and I. In the garden you will see Caraway, our paragon among daughters."

"She who writes verse?"

"She who writes verse."

The darkness of the garden was punctuated by lanterns hanging in the night like burning tulips. The flower beds had been laid out formally. They were dominated by tall bushes of flowering Portuguese laurel, the perfume of which burdened the air with its sensuous flavour.

The hair of Eric Obal's wife was still dark, although streaked with grey. It was bunched to one side of her head and hung almost to her waist, in a manner more appropriate to a younger woman. She walked gracefully by Lunn's side. She spoke calmly, without gesture, in sentences as precise as mathematics.

"We are grateful that you have concerned yourself with our family. It is evidence of goodness that you interest yourself in the character of our dear son, Roi, though if I may say so you misjudge him."

"We know Roi is headstrong. He may have certain

personality defects, such as ambition, which you have endeavoured to cure by casting him into prison. Such a cure may prove too drastic... We have received information that he is at present in the Art Gallery prison – now called the Glory of November the First Corrective Wing, we understand."

Lunn scowled into the darkness.

"My role with regard to your son's treasonous conduct is concluded, madam. He is now the law's concern, not mine."

The lady paused, sighing, beside a shadowy magnolia. She leaned slightly towards him. "'The law'! Dear, dear... how old-fashioned! What's 'the law' these days? Roi remains our concern also, sir."

She moved a little closer. "The future of our family's fortunes depends on our son's remaining alive. Kindly understand that. He is a councillor in the city, and will rise to great power – if his life is spared. Would you not concede, sir, that his incarceration might be in itself sufficient to turn his mind to more correct behaviour in future? That, in other words, he might, if freed, be of great service to the state? And to his parents? And even, sir, to you?"

"Are you not, away in your remote Four Fiefdoms, vulnerable to adverse influences here in Norj?"

Lord Lunn put his hands behind his back. "What do you propose, madam?"

For answer Eric Obal's wife took a few steps along the path and clapped her hands. A light appeared at an upper window just above their heads. The window swung open. A young woman leaned out, holding a lamp before her so that her face was illuminated.

The glow shone upon such perfection of female features as Lunn had never before seen. The arch of her eyebrows, the heavy-lidded eyes, the pert nose, that mouth half-open like a summer rose, the pretty tilted chin – all this framed in coils of hair darker, denser, than the night – immediately struck a wound into Lord Lunn's heart. The young woman became the very embodiment of the perfumes of the warm air.

This cynosure, this paragon, smiled down into the flower-embosomed garden with her dark eyes. She spoke softly from her eyrie, reciting in a velvet tone two lines of her verse:

Who can tell what joys will prevail

When you and yours pierce the silk lining?

As she withdrew from her window, she lowered her lamp. Its glow revealed momentarily that she was naked. The gentle orbs of her breast lent emphasis to the erotic nature of her rhyme. Then she was gone. Her light was extinguished.

Eric Obal's wife continued to speak as if nothing had happened.

"A daughter, even a good obedient daughter such as Caraway, counts for little when weighed against the life of a son. Nevertheless, sir, you might see advantage in such an exchange. Should you liberate Roi from his undignified and perilous confinement this very night, our family would reward you with our daughter – only a small portion of whose charm you have just seen."

"I would need a closer inspection, madam."

"Then you will agree to the arrangement I propose?" In her manner there was even something condescending, as if she were discussing the layout of a new bed of camellias with her gardener.

"Madam, there you have my assurance."

She laughed, perhaps amused by the growl in his voice. "We would of course require that assurance in writing. It would be unfortunate, would it not? if our son were freed one day, only to be re-arrested the next."

"I am in a position to see that would not happen."

"No doubt you are," Eric Obal's wife said, in reflective tones. "Though first you have to leave our property safe and sound, sir. That could be a problem. A written statement from you would guarantee our peace of mind." She paused, contemplating him with cool scrutiny. "Besides the written statement, we would require from you also a dozen cans of Pepsi-Cola, if they were obtainable."

"Is it not enough that I should rescue your worthless son?"

She appeared to take no offence at the tone of this remark. Still smiling her fixed smile, she explained, "You received from our daughter a valuable porcelain porringer. It was not hers to give. We therefore expect that an honourable man would be eager to return a gift of equal value in exchange."

Lord Lunn made her a slight bow. "I will see what can be done."

"A dozen and a half cans will be even more greatly appreciated. We would be even more friendly thereafter." Just for a moment she permitted her lips to become a thin line. Her frown was scarcely discernible in the scented shadows. With the lightest of touches, she laid a hand on his arm. "Let us return indoors. Caraway will be summoned. Servants will dress her suitably, and she will be yours to deal with as you will."

She raised her small hand, which Lord Lunn grasped with his large ones. He increased the pressure. He twisted her thin arm until she was forced to her knees.

"First, madam," he said, "you will suck me off to compensate for your husband's impertinent questioning. On your knees, make no outcry, swallow everything."

Safe back in General Secretary Cooth's establishment, Lord Lunn reclined in a white-tiled bath while servants made arrangements in the next room. A maid poured unguents into the steaming water and applied a sponge to his flesh. When he arose, dripping, she dried him in soft towels. She powdered him. He sat by a mirror while she trimmed his hair and beard. With a final flourish, she cut and polished his toenails.

"Are you content to be black?" he enquired of her, idly, as she prepared to leave the room.

She gave him a wide smile. "I am content to be whatever the Beloved Helmsman pleases, sire."

"A commendable sentiment." He scowled as she made her exit. As if that damned Helmsman cared what colour anyone was.

Stark naked, he entered the bedroom to greet Caraway.

Caraway was entirely as beautiful as the brief glimpse in the garden had suggested. Her face, with its delicate tints, was as fresh as a new-budded rose. Her lips, too, recalled something as fragile as petals. So too did her lower lips, peeping out from under a mossy bank of dark hair.

She had been stripped naked. The servants had tied her to the bed spread-eagled. Her plush hortulan complexion, like that of a ripe peach, suggested fruitiness and succulence. To bite into her would incite an unrivalled delight.

As he tested the knots that bound her, Lord Lunn commended her for such impetrative beauty. Caraway thanked him for the compliment. Asking her if she was comfortable, he received her assent with a grave nod.

"For my brother Roi," said she, "I am happy to do anything. Roi is my senior by three years. I have adored him since I was a baby. Often and often, he would carry me about on his back. Roi showed me profound respect. That was what made me love him so well. He it was who first interested me in the classical poets."

"Never mind your brother." He looked down at her, observing her speculative glance at his engorged member. "Are you prepared for 'me and mine to pierce the silken lining'?"

"You do promise that my dear brother is released unharmed within the hour?"

"That assurance has been accorded your father in writing. He has merely to present the note to General Secretary Cooth and your brother will regain his liberty."

He looked down hungrily upon her. Despite himself, he found himself delaying. Her cool demeanour had touched him.

Almost angrily, he said, "You have never had a lover?"

She spoke as if they were enjoying a tête-a-tête in a drawing room. "There was a young man I cared for once. He wrote me a poem, which he passed up to my bedroom window on a long stick. A long stick but a short poem..."

That was all she said, forcing him to ask, "This young man – he never bedded you?"

Caraway paused before responding with a deliberate note of contempt in her voice. "Certainly not. When I discovered he came from the country, I severed all connection with him. He would probably have stunk of the stable..."

Of a sudden, Lord Lunn burned with rage. The insolence of the Obal family was not to be endured a moment longer.

"Very well!" he shouted. "Very well!"

"Oh!" she said softly, shrinking against the bedding.

Crossing the floor, he flung open the outer door of the chamber. He caught his lower lip between the two strong rows of his teeth and gave a shrilling whistle.

At once a commotion started from below like a devil waking in the basement. Then a great noise and clatter on the wooden stair. It was as though a brute of a man, insensate with drink, endeavoured to throw to the top of the stairs an unwieldy item of furniture. Caraway's eyes widened in fright. She lifted up her head to see what was coming.

Into the room, splintering the doorposts, burst Lunn's great black stallion. The chamber was dimly lit, with two oil lamps standing out from the walls on brass brackets. The horse with its lunging presence immediately dominated the space. Its mane flew. Its eyes enlarged to show their white rims. Its milky pink tongue slavered from its mouth. When it reared up,

both neck and shoulders rammed against the ceiling. Caraway screamed in terror.

"Soft, my friend," said Lunn to his mount. His eyes too seemed to bulge with lust. The immense energy of the beast had communicated itself to him. He was like a satyr, prancing beside the living blackness. As the horse snorted forth a great challenge, so the man roared in excitement. His member smacking against his thighs, Lunn flung himself up on Stalwart's back, crouching low, clinging with fingers and toes to the glossy hide.

He urged the beast forward at the struggling girl.

Stamping across the room, the stallion thrust its weight onto the bed. From her hiding place behind the bathroom curtains, the black maid peered out. Too aghast was she even to scream. Caraway screamed as the huge animal loomed over her. Its hooves came crashing down on the upholstery, one on either side of her shoulders. There was no escape for her. The air was clouded by the stench of lust.

Stalwart, to whom this treat was no novelty, had sprouted an enormous tasselled member. With one guiding foot, Lunn abetted the positioning of this striated crippler. The stallion thrust it home. Screams, noise, fury, erupted in the small space. The maid fell to the floor in horror.

The horse soon withdrew, trailing slobber and semen. Whereupon Lunn threw himself in his turn into the bloody arena. The amorous site was now damaged beyond repair, whirled with slimes and dark intestinal blood.

There, there, Lord Lunn plunged in his dark dagger. He clasped the deflowered girl in rib-cracking embrace, a biting and snarling predator more savage than his horse.

Against the befouled bed Stalwart stood, sweating and trembling. It hung its massive skull down between its forelegs.

The deed was done, the crime complete. It was written.

When he had bathed and clothed himself, and in a fit of self-disgust defiled the insensible maid, Lord Lunn descended to the richly carpeted room downstairs. The black-clad General Secretary glided to meet him.

They exchanged greetings and settled themselves over a flagon of wine. Cooth remarked that a messenger had just delivered an urgent note from the head of the Obal family.

"Do I understand, Lord Lunn, that you wish me to release a certain political criminal from the Glory of November the First Corrective Wing?"

Lunn regarded the other with a penetrating gaze, saying nothing. Cooth was a sturdily built man, almost hairless. Although in his sixties, he still showed every sign of vitality. His great head was sunk low on powerful shoulders. It appeared to sink even lower as he encountered Lunn's gaze. He lowered his own gaze to the table, setting his mouth defiantly.

Cooth was in large measure in Lunn's power. Lunn had discovered the crime of Cooth's ferocious grandfather.

That crime was nowhere recorded – except in the minds of a few men, and across the despoiled lands of the Four Fiefdoms.

The Four Fiefdoms (officially The 63rd Administrative District) had once, long ago, formed a stronghold of resistance against the Revolution. The territory had then still been known – at least to the Resistance – as Oregon. No less a man than Cooth's grandfather had authorized the use of nuclear bombardment against the Resistance. Operation Rat-Catcher had proved successful. The Resistance was wiped out, with all other life.

Mountains had disappeared. Over a million men, women, and children had died. Some said two million (but the figures were spoken in whispers, behind closed doors). No figures were ever published, no announcement ever made. Smothering silence formed a general shroud.

Such a terrifying act of genocide, carried out on so vast a scale, with so little scruple, had paralyzed the psyches of those – the small enabling council – who had planned Operation Rat-Catcher under the command of Cooth's grandfather. Its enormity had chilled even the ruling Helmsman of the day.

That Helmsman had subsequently ordered the destruction of all weaponry, all technology. Despite its awesome success, Operation Rat-Catcher never found favour. Fratricide – brother killing brother and sister – petrified even the most villainous, even later generations, even the higher echelons of the Party. It marked the breakdown of the old society and all its ethical safeguards.

Operation Rat-Catcher – despite repression – remained a potentially damaging issue still. It still waited, like radioactivity in the rushes.

Cooth's continued eminence rested on a conspiracy of silence. Lunn had promoted himself prime keeper of that silence. In the last resort, the General Secretary would cede to Lunn's wishes in order that his grandfather should not be resurrected. He would acquiesce in any crime so that Operation Rat-Catcher would remain officially forgotten. He would give the nod to any atrocity to stay in office.

"What do you wish, Lord Lunn?" he asked in a low voice. He pushed his wine glass aside.

"There's a young woman in an upper room, General Secretary. Possibly dead. Get her away from here at once. Throw her into prison. She's an enemy of the Revolution, a loyalty-flouter."

Giving a nod of acquiescence, Cooth said, "Ah – but the criminal in the Glory of November the First Corrective Wing? What do you desire concerning him? The note says you gave your word to Eric Obal that he would be released immediately. What do you want me to do about that?"

"Pass me the note."

The General Secretary pushed Obal's note across the table, over the ideograms for Deception and Severity. Lunn took it and tore it up without a word. He scattered the pieces on the carpet.

"I suppose you will be riding back to the Four Fiefdoms shortly?" said Cooth. He assumed as polite a tone as he could muster.

The far door of the cell burst open. In rushed the guards, hoarsely shouting. Their shift was almost over. They were drenched with fatigue and disgust, and nearly at the end of their tether. They stank. Their boots and uniforms were covered with

the foul exudations of the wretches they had dragged down to execution in the cellar.

Orders and obscenities poured from their mouths. Only eleven victims remained in what had once been the Mauve Room. Some of them had crawled under bunks in faint hopes of remaining hidden, and so protracting their lives for an hour, or perhaps even overnight.

Screaming, the guards dragged them out by their feet. They kicked these unfortunates as they did so, pressing their faces down into the muck which coated the floor. An elderly woman vomited. Worms struggled for life in her bile on the stones. The guards struck her hollow breast and sent her flying down the cellar stairs.

All was useless haste, as always. The other five victims of their selected six were forced to strip naked. As usual, the guards assisted this operation with shouts and blows, insanely clouting all and sundry in their desperation to be gone from this place, to be done, to be off. The sooner finished, the sooner home to bully their wives and whores into washing their clothes, while they themselves – slumping devastated in broken chairs – gulped alcohol down their throats until they could plunge into unconsciousness.

During all this madness, Roi Obal stood erect in one corner, awaiting his turn to die. His hatred was for guards and prisoners alike. He berated them all in a level voice.

"God curse you all for snivelling bastards. God curse you all for conspiring to banish decency from the world. God curse you all for being scum. God curse you for reducing men and women to animals. God curse you for agreeing to be animals, to crawl and shit and whine and spew. God curse you above all for banishing love and romance from the world... God curse you every one for turning the world into a fucking pigsty."

The guards in their frenzy did not interrupt this litany. Perhaps some dreadful suffocated part of their souls was even comforted by Obal's condemnation. They avoided him. They lashed out insanely at everyone else.

Their knot of prisoners was marshalled, bruised, naked, befilted. They were driven from the room. The door slammed. The bolt rammed home. Cries faded as they milled down into the cellar to meet their fate.

Those remaining in the cell, Obal and four others – three women and a man – preserved a tense silence. Shots rang out below. It was written.

At that moment, the other cell door, the one that led to and away from freedom, was flung open. A guard escorted in a young naked female prisoner. Her belly, buttocks, and legs were covered with blood and slime.

With something approaching delicacy, the guard led her to a lower bunk. The woman sank down, eyes closing in agony. The guard looked about nervously, as if ashamed of his spasm of decency. He patted her head, retreated and slammed the door behind him.

Some of the prisoners shuffled up to inspect this new victim of the Revolution. No one spoke.

The young woman's face was bloated with tears. Her mouth hung open, bruised lips framing broken teeth. Her breath entered and left her body with long-

protracted groans, as if she was breathing her last. Her legs sprawled on the floor. They lay carelessly open, exposing her damaged parts. Perhaps she expected never to close them again.

Obal went over to her, shouting incoherently. He pushed the other prisoners aside. When he ripped open his trousers, the three bedraggled women prisoners cheered and laughed to see his erect organ come flaming forth.

Just before he flung himself on the dying woman, Obal recognized her. He gasped her name. Without opening her eyes, she called his name in response. In a hoarse whisper, she begged him for comfort.

He forced himself roughly into her, cheered on by the other women. He was crying, "Forgive me, forgive me, Caraway!"

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Brian Aldiss is an author who does not rest on his laurels. Born in Norfolk in 1925, and long resident in Oxford, he has written well-received mainstream novels such as *The Hand-Reared Boy* (1970) and *Forgotten Life* (1988) as well as a huge quantity of science fiction and fantasy. His previous contributions to this magazine include "A Life of Matter and Death" (issue 38) and "Softly – As in an Evening Sunrise" (issue 62). We hope and expect that he will be one of the leading contributors to our special "millennium" issue, come the year 2000.

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¹ *Locus* Nov. 1989; ² *Locus* Feb. 1990; ³ *Locus* Feb. 1991

The Mirror Cracked

Paul J. McAuley

First, it is necessary to mention Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. That's the one that goes: "All consistent axiomatic formulations of number theory include undecidable propositions." Which means, of course, that in any theory of mathematics there are statements which cannot be proven using that theory alone – undecidable propositions which can only be shown to be true or false if you step outside the system and use a second theory to examine statements within the first.

Something like this exists in written fiction – usually, a narrator can comment on the verisimilitude of characters and events, but can't comment on the fictive framework that holds them without rupturing it. Our narrator is part of the tale's telling, and cannot step outside the mirror of the fiction in which she is embedded to admire her own reflection.

Which brings us to Sheri S. Tepper's *Beauty* (HarperCollins, £14.99), in which a cunning device, of which more in a moment, is deployed to directly address the problem of the uses of fantasy, to ask its own self whether a text that implicitly invokes magic can retain any relevance to the contemporary world. But although that's at the heart of this long, ambitious fantasy novel, it's not what really makes it glide, icily, across the overpopulated landscape of faery. *Beauty's* postmodern reiteration of the story of Sleeping Beauty may, as the author asserts in a dust-jacket note, be intended as a metaphor and a valediction for the lost beauty of the world – of Nature, of our own lost childhood paradises. And so it does. But it transcends its own earnest propaganda, because at its heart, irreducibly, is the tale of Beauty herself. For *Beauty* is Beauty's own tale, told in her own words, and containing her own reflections on the mode of fictive discourse, the fairy-tale, in which she is embedded.

Beauty is not exactly Sleeping Beauty, although that's her intended fate. She begins to learn something of her fairy mother (who disappeared after her daughter's birth) when her father plans to wed again; learns just enough, in fact, to evade the curse that's been laid upon her – it falls upon her half-sister, born out of wedlock on the same day as herself – and to receive the gifts necessary to sustain

her as she slowly assumes the weight of the burden that has been placed upon her, which is the preservation of magic. When the curse is sprung, and the briars rise around the castle and its sleeping inhabitants, Beauty escapes – and is kidnapped by time-travellers who are recording what they believe to be the last of magic in England, and is transported from the 14th to the 21st century.

Our astonishment parallels Beauty's, but her poise and sense of self is undisturbed and carries us forward, as it will carry her through the rest of the book. The 21st century has banished Nature: it is all teeming anthills of cities, and vast farms to feed the poor. Beauty escapes with the time-travelling documentary crew (who are in trouble for taking her with them) to our own time, which 21st century refugees regard as a Golden Age, just to rub in how bad the future will be. And she settles down to work at becoming a cute American kid until one of the crew rapes her, so she flees again, this time with magical boots she's made with her mother's gifts, first back to the 14th century – where she finds the rape has made her pregnant, marries, and has the child – and then in search of her mother and an explanation.

But the search is no ordinary fantasy quest. Beauty's trip into the future has made her self-knowing – she recognizes in fairy-tales and Disney movies the stuff of her own life. Her voice changes, from innocence to weary irony. Because she has stepped out of the frame, the novel becomes a commentary on its own tropes, deepening as Tepper weaves into the life of Beauty the stories of Cinderella, Thomas the Rhymer and Snow White. Beauty uses her magical boots to find her mother – living inside someone else's fiction and so doubling Beauty's already dizzy perspective – and from there they travel together to the land of faery, where nothing is what it seems (which is to say, it is all a fiction, a virtual reality sustained by consensus). She learns of the Dark Lord, and the truth about magic, and of fairies, who are explicitly not human. And she learns of the dwindling of magic, of which the 21st century is the apotheosis, and that she may, if she can evade the attentions of the Dark Lord, be able to save magic, carry it beyond the end, and reclaim the world.

Tepper is best known for science-

fiction novels such as *Grass* or *Raising the Stones*, but despite some sf aspects (particularly the dystopian future, and the way in which Beauty goes about preserving the beauty of the world), *Beauty* resonates with the kind of longing specifically associated with fantasy – the *recherche du temps perdu*, a nostalgia for the way the past should have been, for order and certitude. It's the book's strength, and it's its greatest fault. We know, as should Beauty, that the 14th century shown here is mostly a fairy-tale. There's plague, although the Black Death occurs in the interstices of Beauty's time-travelling – she leaves before it arrives, and returns after it has ravaged the land. But there's little direct evidence of privation, or disease, or bloody politics, and little of the tremendous repression of women (Mary Gentle has already made this point, in greater detail, in her column in *IZ* 62). *Beauty's* 14th century is a little like a lovingly detailed tapestry showing Lords and Ladies at play: against it, the ravages of the Dark Lord are more perfunctorily shown, and so the he and the other forces ranged against beauty (and Beauty) are diminished. While Beauty's past is imagined whole, the future is merely a generic, off-the-shelf dystopia. Tepper's point is that's all it can be without beauty, but the metaphor's so naked – bare – that it flattens into two dimensions compared to the rest of the book's three.

Still. This is a fantasy with a real person at its heart. Tepper's depiction of Beauty's transformation from headstrong wilfulness, through the accelerated aging caused by her sojourns in the land of faery, to calm measured strength, is masterful. The message is not in the text of this wonderful book: like Rilke's angel, arriving dazzled and bemused by its journey from Heaven, it's in the messenger.

Another book about loss and redemption and saving the world. Elizabeth Ann Scarborough's *Last Refuge* (Bantam, \$26.50 hardback, \$11 trade paperback), is the sequel to *Nothing Sacred*, in which, late in the next century, a mixed group of refugees find sanctuary in Shambala, or Shangri-La, just before the world is devastated by nuclear holocaust. A generation later, babies are being born into Shambala as soulless changelings. The incarnation of Shambala's spiritual guide, Chime Cincinnati, sets out into the world to find out why.

The why of it is simple enough, and explained almost immediately. The world is overpopulated with the ghosts of the plants and animals and humans killed in the holocaust, all seeking reincarnation and fighting over the few new things born into the world: but instead of developing this scenario, the rest of the novel is designed to keep

Chime from delivering the news. She battles ghosts and cannibals, gets rescued by a Yeti. Falls, via a cess-pit, into a hellish version of Shangri-La whose hand-picked inhabitants are ruled by a black magician for his own ends. Gets possessed, saves the world, or at least Shangri-La. Stuff like that.

In a divergent plot, which is the only way Scarborough seems able to open the novel into the world it is supposed to be saving, for Chime spends most of her time underground, an American-Tibetan boy of Chime's own age, who despite being raised in Shambala is sceptical about Tibetan mysticism, gets killed by a secret service agent turned cannibal. He joins up with the ghost of an American girl, Toni-Marie and is banished to the ends of the Earth by the black magician. While they learn how reincarnation rationing is applied in Texas and Ireland, and seek a source of magic that will allow the wheel of life to turn in Shangri-La once more, Chime struggles against the black magician and the cannibal, winning in a nicely unexpected yet fitting way that's the best thing about the book.

There are good things here, particularly the scrupulous care Scarborough takes in her depiction of the traditions and ethics of Tibetan Buddhism. Chime is allowed always to be right, but her truths are not always comfortable: there's a nice hard candid edge to her saintliness. For a change, here's a fantasy that takes its cultural borrowing seriously, but, unfortunately, it can't decide whether or not to take itself seriously. The central metaphor of the pain of the destruction by China of Tibet's culture widened out into the destruction of the world, is too often obscured by cuteness. There's a monk reincarnated as a cat (*Beauty* also suffers from a case of feline cutes), a tough old lady scientist and her camera-toting yeti. There's some nastiness about the cannibal breeding babies on his daughter to eat them (answers on a postcard as to why this is not a sustainable ecological strategy), but it's silly nastiness compared to the real tragedy of Chinese repression that Scarborough also evokes.

And so on. As soon as she starts getting serious, Scarborough knocks it all down with a routine. Comedy often is a prelude to deeper truths, but here it's as if, after Hamlet's soliloquy, the grave-diggers come back and do a ventriloquism act with the skull. As a result, *Last Refuge* falls a long way short of black comedy, and ends up a lesser book than it might otherwise have been.

Tom Holt knows all about frame-busting. By introducing contemporary viewpoints into myths, he has generated comic fantasy variations on the legend of the Flying Dutchman

(*Flying Dutch*), the story of Beowulf (*Who's Afraid of Beowulf?*), and the Norse Gods (*Expecting Someone Taller*). In *Ye Gods* (Orbit, £13.99), he employs this device again, pitting a suburban schoolboy demi-God Hero against the Greek Pantheon, depicted as Dallas-style squabbling siblings.

The plot concerns the Gods' attempt to retrieve Prometheus's other gift to mankind, namely laughter, and the Hero's sulkily reluctant attempts to foil them – it isn't easy, being a Hero, and he'd rather be watching *Star Trek*, and besides, his mother gives him hell for not getting back in time for tea. There are a good enough number of isolated laughs, and one lovely, sustained riff hinged on a vision of how civilization would have developed without a sense of humour, but a persistent sense of ennui and the presence of far too many undigested expository lumps prevents the novel forming a seamless whole. The reader is left with the feeling that Holt, like his own Olympian Gods, didn't really have his heart in the making.

Some sf. *World Enough and Time* (Morrow, \$21) is the final volume of Joe Haldeman's *Worlds* trilogy. Haldeman shot to prominence in the 1970s with *The Forever War*, which, in its depiction of elite troops sacrificing a portion of their humanity in an interstellar war against bug-like aliens, revised the tropes of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* with an authentic toughness. Part of Haldeman's hard-edged vision became incorporated in sf's next evolutionary cycle, but while sf moved on and he's now considered to be a writer of traditional sf, Haldeman is still writing as best he knows how.

World Enough and Time continues the story of Marianna O'Hara, a citizen of the orbiting man-made Worlds, who has already survived a global war which destroyed most of Earth's civilization, and helped save it from the adult-killing plague which followed. Now she is one of the leaders of a colony starship, and the remainder of her story is told by a machine intelligence programmed with her personality. What's impressive is the sweep of the narrative, the skilful compression and elision used to depict the rigours of the starship's long voyage. Marianna must help solve the usual problems which are suffered by colony starships, complicated by deliberate sabotage which wipes most of its library, helps explore a new world, and confronts galaxy-spanning aliens who use her as the raw material by which humanity is judged.

The ingredients may not be original, but Haldeman uses them adroitly to create a fast-paced imaginatively detailed narrative that is as unsparing of its characters as the real world often is. His clear, direct style redeems the clichés – even the *Star Trek* scenario

in which humanity's future hangs on the steadfastness of Marianna's moral judgement holds attention, for it is played for real – and his mordant humour wrings genuine pathos from the juxtaposition of Marianna's humanity, with all its strengths and weaknesses, against the pitiless universe. A polished, expert performance.

Another last volume, this one the conclusion of Keith Brooke's *Expatria* diptych. *Expatria Incorporated* (Gollancz, £14.99) continues and concludes the story begun in *Expatria*, in which the politics of a lost colony world were complicated by first, the discovery that the original starships were still in orbit, and still populated, and second, that a ship from Earth was about to arrive. Which in *Expatria Incorporated* it now does, on an evangelist mission to convert the benighted inhabitants from their own several religions to the corporate religion of GenGen, which lays claim to the world.

Brooke keeps the narrative moving by fast shuffles of viewpoint, although often at a forced march: He introduces Katya Tatin, a loyal employee of GenGen who is seeking to reconfirm her faith after being responsible for the death of her rebel brother; more or less loses sight of Matthew Hanrahan, who had a lot to do with the plot of the first book; but wisely keeps Kasimir Sukui, an advisor of the rulers of one of *Expatria*'s city-states, to the forefront, for Sukui's conceited rationality nicely counterpoints the conflicts of religious belief which drive the plot. There's little that's new in Brooke's pastiche, and once again the alienness of the world itself remains mostly unglimped. What's left is the plot, an intricate series of pratfalls and misunderstandings that seem less urgent than perhaps Brooke intended them to be, and, voiced through Kasimir Sukui, Brooke's affectionate, gently caustic view of human foolishness and fallibility.

(Paul J. McAuley)

The Unreal and the Unfunny

Wendy Bradley

Last month I postulated that it is impossible to write a decent fantasy novel with Nazis in it. *Briar Rose* by Jane Yolen (Tor, \$17.95) is marketed as a fantasy novel, has Nazis in it, and is utterly superb. However Yolen isn't, in my view, trying to make a liar out of me because this isn't really a fantasy novel. Now I am aware that that sounds like special pleading: the book disproves my thesis so the book and not

the thesis must be wrong. However what do we mean by a "fantasy" novel?

This is a novel about a girl finding out that her grandmother was a holocaust survivor and that the unorthodox version of the Sleeping Beauty story that she told her grandchildren was a reflection of all she could remember of her own quite horrific experiences. The granddaughter goes in search of her roots and has some astonishingly fortuitous encounters with people who can tell her the whole story. There is no magic, we are in no other world but this one, nothing happens that could not have happened.

This is "fantasy" only in the sense that the story describes a woman surviving a camp from which no woman is known to have survived: but that is fiction, not fantasy. There is magic in this novel, but it is purely the magic of the human spirit. There is evil in this book but that, too, is no fantasy but a fictionalized representation of the evil that, alas, lurks alongside that magic inside of that spirit. The critic in me says this book is too pat, has too many coincidences, dumps too much convenient information too easily on its heroine. The reader in me, however, picked the book up in an idle lunch hour and finished it four avid hours later. What more could one ask?

The next three books I read this month were all from people whose previous novels I had enjoyed hugely: and in each case I was mildly disappointed with the follow up.

Simon Green's **Blood and Honour** (Gollancz, £14.99) takes place in the same world as his *Blue Moon Rising* but at another time and in another country. Jordan, an actor, is recruited to impersonate Prince Viktor at Castle Midnight, "where the Real and Unreal mix." The king has magic powers which keep the Unreal – similar to the forces of chaos from roleplay games, all manner of ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties – at bay but on the death of King Malcolm his three heirs (respectively Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know) are left without the magic regalia which would allow any of them to take over as heir and are consequently locked in conflict with each other rather than with the forces of Unreality. Viktor is being poisoned, so Jordan is recruited to impersonate him and hide his weakness from his rivals.

Jordan, however, begins to understand that his concept of kingship, based on the heroes of the plays he has performed in, is more valid and certainly more useful, than the three princes', which seems to be based on a very crowleyesque "do as thou wilt."

So what is wrong with the book? There is a juxtaposition of simple and straight heroic characters, in Viktor's retinue and the castle staff, with the

devious and deviant – princes, monsters, the undead – and in the middle is Jordan, not simple enough to be good, not devious enough to be bad.

There is an unfortunate tendency for the story to fall apart at the end: when Jordan finally confronts Viktor the confrontation is out of character, contrary to what we know of Jordan's own concept of himself as the hero of his own life. The final climactic scene – a magical barriers of briars erupting around the throne – is just plain badly visualized. One of those irritating books that is much less good than it should have been but which is still evidence of a rising talent.

The Gates of Noon (Gollancz, £14.99 & £8.99) is Michael Scott Rohan's sequel to his *Chase the Morning*, a book I liked a lot. Unfortunately, although this, too, is an enormously likeable book in parts it also has some rather less successful patches. His hero Steve Fisher is still a heartless yuppie and has once more managed to suppress his memories of his experience of sailing through the archetypal lands of the Rim or Wheel, which exist outside of or tangential to the mundane reality of our workaday world, the Hub, the Core. I still adore the concept but despise the character, and this book is ever so slightly thinner, somehow, than the first one. Rohan brings in a new set of characters and the most interesting ones from his previous book, Jyp and Mall, appear only in a brief episode, reduced to thick-accented caricatures of their former selves. There is also a scene set on one island (clue: a jungle-covered island divided in two by a sturdy wall with gigantic gates...) at which you will either gasp at the audacity of the concept or, like me, snort in derision. Maybe volume three will have some more oomph.

Similarly Guy Gavriel Kay's latest, **Song for Arbonne** (HarperCollins, £14.99), is a tad less impressive than his previous book, *Tigana*. Although since *Tigana* was the best new book I read in a year – not just the best fantasy book, the best book, unqualified – it would have been difficult for the new one not to suffer in comparison.

Song for Arbonne is not a sequel, nor even set, so far as I could tell, in the same world. Arbonne is a country analogous to the courtly medieval France of the troubadours but with a goddess-worshipping religion and some minor working magics. Its rival Gorhaut is a butch, monastical, anti-female society. We follow the fortunes of these countries as they manoeuvre into a war and through the war and we learn to care about the people affected by the conflict. The central characters are likeable in the main and we learn to love but also to understand them, all except the fanatical high priest of

Gorhaut who has to be a plain villain – just as everyone has to adore the same woman – to make the plot work. I had a good cry during the climactic fight scene, and again it was a book I couldn't put down once I had got beyond the first couple of chapters. This is a cracking good fantasy novel: it is only because *Tigana* set such a high standard that *Arbonne* suffers in comparison.

Finally, I turn reluctantly to **Scheherazade's Night Out** by Craig Shaw Gardner (Headline, £15.99). Nothing makes you cringe more than someone trying to be funny and failing. I was cringing in sympathy with Craig Shaw Gardner all the way through this book.

Scheherazade does her tale-telling, trying to distract the ensorcelled king from his conflicting desires to ravish her and to chop off her head. However the principal joke is the inseting of a tale within a tale within a tale within ... at some points there are five sets of inverted commas being used to denote the level of quotation and I have to tell you no-one except Victor Borge can make punctuation funny (and even he can't do it on the page). So, the cod Arabian Nights style isn't funny, the punctuation joke isn't funny, the ravishing joke really isn't funny; in fact I cannot recall a single guffaw – even a single smirk – in the entire book. And there is the most disgusting snot joke I have ever come across in my life: so disgusting that I am still retching at the thought. Maybe I am just having a bad sense-of-humour failure but I genuinely cannot think of a single thing to recommend about this novel. It's not even bad enough to be funny!

(Wendy Bradley)

Astonishing Psychopathology

Chris Gilmore

Tanith Lee writes about sin. She is far from being the first to do so, but she does so in an unusual fashion, in that while her vision of sin lends itself to a moralistic approach, her literary posture, as expressed through both her viewpoint characters, is an extreme form of quietism. The effect is to render preposterous any analysis based on psychological realism, which would be a reason for discarding it except that Lee evidently expects her characters to engage the reader's interest and sympathy.

In **Heart-Beast** (Headline, £15.99) the female principal, Laura, is a girl of low peasant stock. Her father is

Huckleberry Finn's father, only with less style; her mother combines the morals of Juliet's nurse with the demeanour of an apple dumpling gone sour; her sisters would excite no comment in a comprehensive in Hackney. She, defying all theories of heredity and environment, combines patrician beauty and sensibilities to match. These qualities attract Hyperion Worth, sprig of the local gentry who, in his inexperience, pays her court with a persistence and good humour worthy of a better cause; for Laura, in her sullen resentment against God and all his works, will barely render him common civility. When he at last finds the winning line – it's late, it's cold outside, she's tired and he's importunate – she yields her virginity with such a studied lack of grace as would sap the libido of a more thoughtful man. Hyperion, knowing no better, marries her.

Meanwhile Daniel, our hero, having murdered his father for beating up his mother once too often, flees to take up a clerical position in the Levant. There he briefly encounters a sinister diamond and finds himself turned into a werewolf. Every full moon he goes into fugue and on the rampage, in which condition he is invulnerable. Being taken in by an eccentric and saintly old millionaire who seems intent on playing Antonio to his Bassanio, he contemplates his immediate prospects:

Daniel felt a deep depression. He would kill Bernardin and take all his gold, his silver and his banknotes. It was so simple. And since he could feel no compunction, no dread of his own foul act, he stepped aside into a type of sorrow, a malaise.

With such principals, little wonder that the subsidiary characters are generally unappetizing. Faude, a French pimp, acquires a beautiful young Persian girl, with whose affections he trifles in the following manner: having fed her up and cosseted her until she regards him as a father, he puts on a show for twenty degenerates which consists solely of her being kicked to death.

Stifle your distaste for a moment and ponder the economics: granted that the girl is Persian, and presumably a Zoroastrian or a Shi'ite, even in 19th-century Port Said there were laws against that sort of thing. Faude must therefore publicize his geek-show clandestinely and cover his overhead and compensate himself for the risk, which means everyone present must pay considerably over 5% of the girl's value as a prostitute, which he is ideally placed to exploit, either directly or by selling her in the trade.

Historically when such entertainments have taken place they have either been staged by rich men wishing

to amaze their friends and discomfit their rivals (first-century Rome), or happened in places where there was no cash nexus (Auschwitz), or have been sanctioned by religion (most times, most places). The last person to stage one is a greed-motivated pimp.

So why does he do it? Because he inhabits Tanith Lee's hyper-Calvinist universe, wherein all are hopelessly damned, and all are determined to demonstrate the justice of their damnation. Full-time devotion to the Sin Against the Holy Ghost is a grim business, which admits no shirkers.

If you can accept Lee's postulates you can set about enjoying the story, which proceeds in a series of setpiece events, disjointed in time and no less in space: except for London, no place in the book, be it hamlet, farm, town, nation, street or mansion is mentioned by name; as for who's on the throne, Heaven knows – with Champagne-drinkers and wolves in England, paper money in the Levant, dirigible hot-air balloons in the sky, period is hard to assign. Daniel reappears at home, without reference to whatever inconveniences annoy a werewolf travelling from the Near East to Britain. The diamond reappears, on Laura's bosom this time. Daniel is well smitten with both, and it occurs to Laura that life may hold more than her husband's tedious gallantries and their responsive toll of bogus orgasm.

But even this second seduction is insufficient to rouse any of the major characters from their fatalistic lethargy. Such servants as have survived Daniel's lunar depredations walk out, but Hyperion is too sunk into accidie to go to the trouble of hiring more; another servant poisons Laura's lummoxy family and decamps likewise, but no more effort is made to apprehend her than to restrain Daniel, to whom the simple expedient of passing his lupine nights camping on some untenanted rock is evidently too much effort – instead he hangs about drinking brandy with the complaisant Hyperion.

So wherein lies the book's charm, what kept me turning the pages? It's the invincible conviction Lee brings to all its absurdities. If it's preposterous, it's also compelling, like the later chapters of Ballard's *High Rise* or Mai Zetterling's *Night Games*. I found myself reading a meta-novel, about the sort of person who would find in this book a reflection of the real world. What astonishing psychopathology! And how exciting to have it displayed in such meticulous detail without the tedium of meeting it in reality! And that, Gentle Reader, is what literature is all about.

(Chris Gilmore)

Year's Bests? Jones & McIntosh

It didn't take much arm-twisting. In fact, we'd been waiting the better part of a year to get our hands on **The Year's Best Science Fiction, Ninth Annual Collection** edited by Gardner Dozois (St Martin's Press, \$27.95 hc; \$15.95 trade pb; published in the UK by Robinson as *Best New SF 6*). After all, for both of us, its immediate predecessor had been the outstanding anthology of last year by a very long way, the sort of rare, dazzling beauty of a book that defies you to try and put it down. Which means, of course, that the *Eighth Collection* was always going to be a hard act to follow.

At first sight, not a lot has changed. For a sizeable outlay you get a sizeable book, 28 stories in all and many of them fairly long. The writers – predominantly American, but a sizeable minority of Brits – are drawn in the main from the heavyweight league, and when a scan down the listings pulls up names like William Gibson, Greg Egan, Karen Joy Fowler, Kim Stanley Robinson, Ian McDonald, Connie Willis and Robert Silverberg, there's every reason to hope we're set for as exhilarating a ride as we enjoyed a year ago.

Except that we're not. As we pick our way through the book, what we experience is a gradually mounting sense of disappointment. This was the book to look forward to and yet it leaves us feeling let down because this time around, with just a few exceptions, the stories consistently fail to catch fire. In fact, before we've reached halfway we're flicking back to the front of the book to check whether, by any chance, we've picked up *The Year's Fairly Reasonable Science Fiction* by mistake. Lest our disappointment be mistaken for something more damning, let's say right out these stories are all, as you'd expect from a Dozois anthology, well-written and good enough in their way. But what's thin on the ground here is the sheer excitement, the dazzle which made so many of last year's stories such compelling reading and the collection as a whole such a sustained pleasure to read.

As you'd expect, there are exceptions, a handful of stories that would be right at home in last year's collection, particularly – it just so happens – by several of the writers well-known to *Interzone*. You may remember Kim Newman's playful variation on the Superman story in "Übermensch" from *New Worlds*, Greg Egan's "Blood Sisters" and – this last the gem of this collection, sharp, concise and startlingly inventive – "Gene Wars" by Paul McAuley.

Another of the collection's most impressive stories is "Matter's End" by Gregory Benford, which plays off western science and eastern mysticism in an India comprehensively ruined by western exploitation. Also strong are two more conventional hard-sf stories, "A Walk in the Sun" by Geoffrey A. Landis and "Eyewall" by Rick Shelley. Landis's tale of a moon-stranded astronaut is the most readable of the two, but Shelley's story, which explores the uncomfortable overlaps between science and exploitation, is slow-building but ultimately engrossing. Also on the plus side, we have: "Beggars in Spain" by Nancy Kress, a solid, thoughtful exploration of the possibilities – planned and unforeseen – of genetic enhancement; the strange but powerful "The Dark" by Karen Joy Fowler; and the unusual mixture of vampires and the London Blitz served up in Connie Willis' "Jack," worth reading for the painstakingly researched evocation of wartime England alone. Oh, and for fans of Ian R. MacLeod (and that's us) there's "Marnie," which is good enough but just a little too reminiscent of Another-Story-by-Ian-MacLeod to fully satisfy.

But that leaves us a long way short of 28 stories. We could single out some of the ones that don't seem to us to work so well, but the real point is that it's the collection as a whole that just doesn't shift over into the fast lane. Any one of these 28 could, in theory, have appeared amongst the stories in the Eighth collection, and the ones we've singled out above would have been right at home there. But that collection scored by running one really high-octane story after another – and letting synergy do the rest. Is it that our expectations were just too high? Partly perhaps, but then a cool comparison of the two volumes confirmed (to us at least) that there were simply a lot more best stories last year. Has Dozois made the wrong choices, then, or is it that 1990 was simply a better year for sf than 1991? Perhaps our comparison is just too limited – and the Eighth collection stands out against best-collections from any number of years. Whatever, readers seeking the adrenalin blur of last year's model beware: this is a book which asks you politely to keep on turning the pages rather than dragging you breathless through to the last line of the last story.

Perhaps it was because we weren't expecting so much from *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, Fifth Annual Collection* edited by Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling (St Martin's Press, \$27.95) that we enjoyed it more than we thought we were going to. Previous collections we've registered on the worthy-but-dull scale but this time around the proportion of genuinely engrossing stories seems to have gone right up.

For example, there's a very fine collaboration from Robert Holdstock and Garry Kilworth, "The Ragthorn," which skilfully details a man's search for the secret of immortality that may lie in an ancient and sinister tree. Ramsey Campbell is on top form too with "The Same in Any Language," and there's a dark, disturbing exploration of the erotic allure of pornography from Karl Edward Wagner, "The Kind Men Like." Also here are Stephen Gallagher, S.P. Somtow, C.J. Cherryh, Terry Bisson, K.W. Jeter and Kathe Koja (who contributes the single overlap with the Dozois sf collection, "Angels in Love").

This year again it's the horror stories that, with just a few exceptions, seem the strongest. Which is probably down to our personal preferences. But, fantasy and horror in one book? There's undoubtedly a broad area of overlap, but many of the stories belong quite clearly to one camp or the other – as well might their potential readerships. There are really two books here, shotgun-married together, and perhaps it's time for the two to call in the divorce lawyers and go their separate ways.

(Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh)

Out of the Light, Back Into the Cave Andy Robertson

I heard about this book for the first time while reading the scientific journal *Nature*. In the leading article, no less, the editor John Maddox ponderously slagged it off, regretting the malicious influence it seemed to be having on important members of parliament, and ended by labelling it "dangerous" – which was rather like seeing a bishop brawling with a street urchin. Subsequent events did indeed seem to show that it had made a deep impression in some unusual places. It got top billing in the review pages of *The Economist*, *New Society*, the *Spectator*, and several other upmarket magazines; the *Times*, where its author Brian Appleyard works as a journalist, organized a major public debate (with him and Fay Weldon vs the rest), on the motion that quote "The heartless truths of Science strip man of his spiritual dignity" unquote; Appleyard got on *The Late Show* to defend his pitch; and presumably a lot else happened that I missed. And finally Private Eye put Appleyard among its coveted "Top Ten Bores," at number two, (just after Stephen Hawking, 4444 weeks on list). You may guess that when IZ asked me to review *Understanding The Present* by Bryan

Appleyard (Picador, £14.99), I jumped at the chance.

So what is this book that the world's foremost scientific journal denounces as "dangerous"? Hot stuff? Well, let me paint a bit of the conceptual background in first.

There is an ancient analogy of the human condition that derives, I think, from Plato (though he was a philosopher and he didn't quite mean it the way I am going to use it). In this myth humanity is likened to a man chained in a cave, facing the wall and unable to turn round. From the shadows on the wall we have to work out everything we know – what casts the shadows, what lies outside the cave, and how we got there in the first place. Obviously the resolution to the story that Plato wanted us to imagine is as follows: the man casts off his chains, rises, turns to gaze on the shapes of reality outside the cave, and then walks out, presumably into a bright new day. It is an infinitely powerful and hopeful myth, and you could say that it is this picture of humanity moving from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, that has enlivened our culture since the Renaissance. But in the last generation or so we have written a sour postscript. The man goes half-mad with fear, runs back into the cave, and chains himself once more, vowing never to turn round or venture out again. And in some versions of the postscript the man also blinds himself, to make sure that he will never, never, have to touch or see that terrifying reality outside the cave in future.

The flight back into the cave is on with a vengeance today. It is seen in resurgent or insurgent religious fundamentalism, in "New Age" pseudopaganism, in persistent superstition, in aspects of the politically correct Left with its explicit rejection of Western thought-modes, and above all in the Green movement, the burgeoning worship of the big mummy in the ground who will save us and give us suck if only we are good and put away our nasty technological toys. Our "quality" papers, the liberal arts sections of our Universities, and the institutions that produce our television, films and popular fiction, are aswarm with frightened people screaming out the need for retreat, like cockroaches running back under a fridge. And this is far from being hard to understand. The things casting the shadows turn out not to be safe and pretty after all, and what lies outside the cave of ignorance where we have spent most of our life as a species is not the paradise of flowers we hoped for. The disillusion and fear which is felt not just by intellectuals but by a majority of ordinary people is not irrational. The scientific revolution has scarcely begun, and we have

already brought the stars down out of the sky to use in our wars. Many people believe that what we have seen is only a dim foreshadowing of what's to come, and they are right.

So where does Appleyard's book fit in? And is it really so special? Yes, I think it is. In fact, I think it's almost unique, and I'll try to explain why. Attacks on science are ten-a-penny nowadays, but they can typically be summarized by a simple formula like this: "X is the answer to the World's problems, and therefore science, though useful in some ways, must ultimately bow to X, at least in the sphere of human life." This summary doesn't just apply to religions, but to almost all popular cultural movements – the things Dawkins calls *memes*. A Marxist, for instance, comes equipped with a doctrine that offers a complete explanation of history, and is energized by the knowledge that he or she is participating in a programme for improving the lot of humanity, in harmony with the inevitable unfolding of this history; a Feminist knows that the world's problems are down to Patriarchy, which must first be overthrown before any real good can be done; a Green knows that the harmony of Nature, in which we could peacefully live, has been broken by the scientific and technological revolution, and that to address the real problem this revolution must be repented of pronto and without any futile tinkering about; and so on. In every case we have a solution, X, and belief in X offers us the psychological benefits of knowing that we have The Answer and that we are one of a group of virtuous people working for the world's salvation. These psychological benefits are so enormous that facts which threaten them are suppressed, distorted, or simply filtered out. And science, of course, insistently proffers just such facts. The major strength of Appleyard's book is that, unlike the others, he has no little pet solution to peddle, no X to believe in, and he is free to be absolutely honest. Therefore he is free to understand that science is not a search for *solutions*, but a search for *facts*, and he is free to understand that science has been so uniquely successful because of this. Of course this is another way of saying that science is value-free and objective, and is not just the expression of the self-justifications of a particular society at a particular time, and Appleyard does acknowledge this fully and completely, even though, I think, he hates it.

The thrust of the book is that, in order to live, people need meanings and truths, not just facts: and that the scientific worldview is intrinsically and unalterably opposed to the sort of human meanings people need. It's an old enough idea, but it has rarely, if

ever, been presented this well before. I could reply that even if most people are disillusioned with science, they are far more worried about social breakdown, nuclear war, or global warming, than they are about deep philosophical points and the ifness of the what: but Appleyard would reply that these problems are part and parcel of the moral neutrality that science enforces, and I think that to a considerable extent he is correct. Our inability to easily decide what is good, or what to value, is unalterably tied in with our practical troubles. Do we have the right to enforce liberal behaviour on intolerant religions like Islam? How do we balance starving children against the extermination of whole species of plants and animals? Should we return to sexual faithfulness to beat AIDS? Etcetera. Whether science actually has no guidance to give us on right behaviour is an open question, but there's nothing remotely foolish about the linkage Appleyard claims.

I could now summarize the book's content, except that no mere summary could really do it justice. It is very well written indeed; and if its major strength is its basic understanding of what science is, its minor strength is certainly that it is the best capsule history of science, and the best account of the pseudoreligious hangers-on to modern science, that I have ever read. In particular, the parts dealing with the modern attempts to extract some sort of meaning from the weird extremes of Physics are very impressive. I confess that as I read these I was cynically laying bets with myself as to which bolt-hole Appleyard would go down. Eastern-mysticism-is-supported-by-the-truths-of-modern-science? No. Eco-Gaianism? No. Morphic Resonance? No. Quantum-mechanics-restores-the-significance-of-human-consciousness-because-of-the-relationship-between-the-observer-and-the-observed? No. God-in-the-Anthropic-Principle? No, no, no. To see past all this crap without (presumably) a scientific background argues a formidable mother-wit, or maybe it just shows that Appleyard, unlike most searchers, is not deceiving himself: he is not trying to find a meaning where there is none.

So what solution – or rather "solution," since we must be wary of solutions, I suppose – does Appleyard offer? I'm afraid that in this he is less rigorous and less satisfactory. In his final chapter, "The Humbling of Science," he ends the book with what is really a raw appeal for the primacy of human values over scientific objectivity, buttressed by what I (in my typically scientific "philosophical naivety" as Appleyard would say) regard as a lot of doubletalk about the meaning of language. I found this disappointing and unconvincing, but the

final chapter does retain a certain force. In the end, science remains something people do, not something that does people, and every bit of it has to be interpreted through a human mind. It's quite fair to say that to allow science to undermine values that people need to have in order to think is to allow the branch to bite off the tree: but I'm not quite as sure as Appleyard is that we do need those particular values in order to think. We may, of course need them in order to be comfortable, or even to stay alive, but that's quite a different matter.

This review is not going to end with me putting forth my own private ideas about how to set everything right. However, I do have a few comments to make. Especially in his concluding chapters, Appleyard makes some basic and serious mistakes. One of these is his use of the term "liberalism," which he defines as a form of society which does not enforce its ideology on its citizens, and which he takes to be the natural end-point of any society that is based on science. This is a perfectly fair and workable definition, but before long his use of the term slips round to what we more normally mean by "liberalism," the political left. This is rather unfortunate, since science no more supports the shibboleths of left-liberalism than it does the Kabbala, and left-liberalism has shown itself perfectly capable of distorting and suppressing inconvenient scientific knowledge when it wants to – witness, for instance, the posthumous campaign of slander which successfully discredited Cyril Burt. More seriously, Appleyard swallows whole and without even realizing that he has done so another central tenet of the left – the idea that people are formed solely by their society and the dogmas it holds, without having any important intrinsic characteristics as birthright (what we used to call "human nature"). This is an idea which has gained a tacit but almost universal acceptance today, but nonetheless it is an idea that goes flat against all scientific evidence as well as all ordinary human experience.

Apart from that, there are some very relevant scientific developments that Appleyard is ignorant of. Throughout the book, and in particular in his penultimate chapter, "The Assault on the Self," he deals with scientific attempts to investigate, unpick, or partially duplicate humanity. In doing this he touches on everything from Freudianism to AI, but the one science which might really give an insight into the human moral condition is not even mentioned. Good popularizations of Sociobiology have been thin on the ground in the past, but I can now suggest that Appleyard beg, buy or borrow a copy of Helena Cronin's book *The Ant and the Peacock* (Cambridge

University Press, £27.50) to get a background understanding of this outstandingly successful theory of animal behaviour (a term which, of course, includes human behaviour), though I doubt that he will like what he reads. Sociobiology can account for almost all the behaviour we think of as uniquely human from a mechanistic, evolutionary, perspective – not only greed and lust, but love, friendship, honour, pity and all types of altruism. Significantly, the first of Appleyard's demonstrations of the impossibility of human life in "scientific-liberal" society concerns the persistence of ethnic solidarity (less politely known as racism) even among people who have been indoctrinated from birth in its wickedness; and this is of course just one uncomfortable fact among many which sociobiology may also explain.

So the book falls down at the end. But overall, I find it very impressive indeed. I suppose I have to count myself against Appleyard, and I certainly don't agree with him, but I must say I like him a lot more than many a pro-scientific writer I've read. Better than the people who continue to give out bland assurances that science is nothing but a way of solving the world's problems: better, even, than superb populists like Gould or Dawkins, who explain scientific theories so well, but seem to be blind to the real moral implications of these theories. If modern Western culture is the panic-stricken rout I believe it to be, I would not, after all, place Appleyard among those fleeing out of the light, back into the cave. Rather, he's someone who sees and describes, clearly and with courage, the landscape outside the cave: and who, even though he makes many mistakes, is honestly trying to find a way to live here. But if we really are going to survive out here, I'm afraid we are going to need more and better vision, not less. (Andy Robertson)

UK Books Received July 1992

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* of the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Ashley, Mike, ed. *The Camelot Chronicles: Heroic Adventures from the Time of King Arthur*. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-130-7, 418pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains a mixture of new and reprint stories by Hilary Belloc, Vesa Chapman, Phyllis Ann Karr, Howard Pyle, Darnell Schweitzer, Keith Taylor, Peter Tremayne, P.G. Wodehouse, Jane Yolen and others.) 24th August 1992.

Brown, Eric. *Meridian Days*. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32287-7, 165pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (SF novel, first edition; this is, as they say, the "sagely awaited" first novel by the author of *The Time-Lapsed Man* and *Other Stories* [1990]; it looks interesting.) 7th August 1992.

Card, Orson Scott. *The Memory of Earth: Homecoming, Volume 1. Century/Legend*. ISBN 0-7126-5411-9, 294pp, hardcover, £14.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1982; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the start of another five-volume series by Card, set in the distant future; reviewed by Paul McAnulty in *Interzone* 58.) 13th August 1992.

Card, Orson Scott. *Speaker for the Dead*. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-950320-4, 415pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1986; sequel to *Ender's Game*; this is the 5th Arrow printing, slightly revised and with the new author's introduction which first appeared in a recent American edition.) 6th August 1992.

Card, Orson Scott. *Xenocide*. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-952500-3, 562pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1991; sequel to *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 52.) 6th August 1992.

Clarke, Arthur C. *The Other Side of the Sky*. Gollancz/VGCSF, ISBN 0-575-03988-4, viii+245pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF collection, first published in the USA, 1958; fourth VGCSF printing.) 6th August 1992.

Cook, Glen. *The White Rose: The Third Chronicle of The Black Company*. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016555-X, 317pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 30th July 1992.

Cook, Robin. *Blindsight*. Macmillan, ISBN 0-232-4489-3, 239p, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1992; it's another of the author's trademarked "medical thrillers," possibly with sf elements.) 21st August 1992.

Cook, Robin. *Vital Signs*. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32147-1, 394pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1991; another medical thriller with sf elements.) 21st August 1992.

Dalby, Richard, ed. *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*. Introduction by Jennifer Uglow. Virago, ISBN 1-85381-480-6, 347pp, paperback, £6.99. (Ghost-story anthology, first published in 1988.) 20th August 1992.

Davey, John. *Michael Moorcock: A Reader's Guide*. 2nd edition. Foreword by Michael Moorcock. Davey [45 St Mary's Mansions, St Mary's Terrace, London W2 5SH], no ISBN shown, 39p, ringbound, £4.99. (Bibliographical guide to the work of the leading British fantasy author; a tiny first edition appeared in 1991; this revised and expanded reissue is limited to 300 copies.) 31st July 1992.

Delany, Samuel R. *Dhalgren*. "Over 1,000,000 copies sold in the USA." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21419-4, 879pp, paperback, £6.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1975; a highly unconventional novel of futuristic urban life, with a last sentence which runs into the first sentence [Finnegans Wake-style]; it is one of the unlikely bestsellers of recent decades; remarkably, this is its first ever appearance in a British edition.) 6th August 1992.

Eddings, David. *Domes of Fire: The Tamuli, Book One*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13843-2, 479pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; the beginning of a new trilogy which follows on from the

events of "The Elenium"; see comments on David Eddings, below.) 17th August 1992.

Eddings, David. *Seeress of Kell: Book Five of The Malloreon*. Corp, ISBN 0-552-13021-4, 444pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 54; according to the accompanying publicity sheet, Eddings' previous series, "The Belgariad," has now sold "over a million copies in the UK"; good grief, one can see why HarperCollins, who call him "the pre-eminent modern fantasy writer," were willing to pay huge sums to wrest Eddings away from Corp.) 13th August 1992.

Farris, John. *Fiends*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21192-6, 430pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th August 1992.

Forstchen, William R. *Union Forever: The Lost Regiment #2*. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016749-8, 457pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 30th July 1992.

Garnett, David, ed. *New Worlds 2*. "Britain's most celebrated science fiction anthology." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05145-0, 293pp, trade paperback, £5.99. (SF anthology, first edition; contains new stories by Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Paul Di Filippo, Marc Laidlaw, David Langford, Ian McDonald, Ian Watson, etc., as well as snippets by Michael Moorcock and the late Philip K. Dick, and illustrations by Jim Burns; it looks good.) 13th August 1992.

Gatiss, Mark. *Nightshade: The New Doctor Who Adventures*. "Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-582-20376-3, 231pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition.) 20th August 1992.

Gourmont, Remy de. *The Angels of Perversity*. Translated and introduced by Francis Amery. Dedalus, ISBN 0-946626-81-2, 176pp, paperback, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; originally published in France, in various volumes, 1980s; several of the stories appear here in English for the first time; all are fine examples of fin de siècle "decadence," well timed for revival as we enter our own end-of-century cultural phase.) 6th August 1992.

Grant, Charles L. *Something Stirs*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56225-5, 275pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 6th August 1992.

Greenberg, Martin H., ed. *New Stories from the Twilight Zone*. Introduction by Alan Brennert. Warner/Orbit, ISBN 0-7084-5455-9, 285pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (SF/fantasy/horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; despite the title, there's not much that's new here; it contains 21 of the original stories on which episodes of the "New Twilight Zone" TV series were based, by Greg Bear, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Harlan Ellison, Joe Haldeman, Richard Matheson, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Roger Zelazny and others.) 27th August 1992.

Greenland, Colin. *Michael Moorcock: Death is No Obstacle*. Introduction by Angela Carter. Savoy, ISBN 0-86130-087-4, xiv+146pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Interview collection, first edition; it consists of lengthy discussions between MM and Dr Greenland of Moorcock's work and imaginative writing in general; Angela Carter's four-page introduction, written shortly before her death, is witty and generous; recommended; this book has been delayed for about a year, presumably because of Savoy's legal problems occasioned by their publication of a controversial novel by David Britton called *Lord Horror*.) 24th August 1992.

Halam, Ann. *Dinosaur Junction*. Orchard Books, ISBN 1-85213-368-4, 188pp, trade paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile sf/novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]. "Ann Halam" is a pseudonym of Gwyneth Jones.) 16th July 1992.

Hambly, Barbara. *The Rainbow Abyss*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21300-7, 295pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 54.) 6th August 1992.

Harrison, Sue. *Mother Earth, Father Sky*. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40487-3, 384pp, paperback, £3.99. (Prehistoric sf/novel, first published in the USA, 1990; set about 9,000 years ago, in the Aleutian Islands, it's a good example of that apparently thriving genre, the "women's prehistorical.") 13th August 1992.

Harrison, Sue. *My Sister, the Moon*. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40258-9, 449pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Prehistoric sf/novel, first published in the USA [?] 1992; sequel to *Mother Earth, Father Sky*.) 13th August 1992.

Irwin, Robert. *The Arabian Nightmare*. Decadus, ISBN 1-873982-05-4, 266pp, paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1983; subsequently in Penguin Books; now reissued by its original publisher, who bills it as "a masterpiece and one of the great works of 20th century fiction"; it comes with commendations from Hilary Bailey, John Galt, John Crowley, Ruth Rendell, Brian Stableford and Heathcote Williams, among others; if the critical overkill doesn't put you off, this is obviously a Must Read item.) 12th August 1992.

Jakubowski, Maxim, and Edward James, eds. *The Profession of Science Fiction: SF Writers on Their Craft and Ideas*. Foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. "Insights." Macmillan Press, ISBN 0-333-52482-9, xi+208pp, trade paperback, £12.99. (Collection of critical and autobiographical pieces by sf writers, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; there are reprints from Foundation: The Journal of Science Fiction, and contributors include James Blish, David Brin, Richard Cowper, Ursula Le Guin, M. John Harrison, Gwyneth Jones, Naomi Mitchison, Norman Spinrad, Jack Williamson and Gene Wolfe; J.G. Ballard is represented by an interview recast in "autobiographical" form by David Pringle — that's the "Shanghai to Shepperton" piece from 1982.) 3rd September 1992.

Kay, Guy Gavriel. *The Darkest Road: The Fionavar Tapestry, Book Three*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21524-7, 420pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Canada, 1986; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 22; this trilogy was originally published in UK paperback by Unwin Hyman in the late 1980s [before that company was taken over by HarperCollins]; presumably HarperCollins/Grafton must have reissued volumes one and two quite recently, but we haven't seen them.) 9th July 1992.

Kilworth, Garry. *Frost Dancers: A Story of Hares*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13915-3, 381pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first edition; the third of Kilworth's animal books, following but not directly connected to *Hunter's Moon* and *Midnight's Sun*.) 20th August 1992.

Lamadale, Joe R. *Savage Season*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56798-2, 210pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th August 1992.

McAleer, Neil. *Odyssey: The Authorized Biography of Arthur C. Clarke*. Foreword

by Patrick Moore. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05448-8, xii+430pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Biography of the leading sf writer, first edition; it begins: "The stars were bright over Somerset in 1917. In France, however, the skies were filled with the flares and artillery shells of World War I..."; it's good to see a substantial biography of Clarke, but who is Neil McAleer?) 13th August 1992.

McAuley, Paul J., and Kim Newman, eds. *In Dreams*. "A celebration of the 7-inch single in all-original and horror fiction." Introduction by Charles Shaar Murray. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05201-5, 447pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF/horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories by an interzone-like roster of names: Stephen Baxter, Barrington Bayley, Scott Bradfield, Jonathan Carroll, Greg Egan, Colin Greenland, Gwyneth Jones, Graham Joyce, Jonathan Lethem, Ian R. MacLeod, Alastair Reynolds, Nicholas Royle, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson, Don Webb, Andrew Weiner and others, including horror-merchants Christopher Fowler and F. Paul Wilson; we recommend it, obviously.) 6th August 1992.

McCaffrey, Anne. *All the Ways of Pern*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13729-4, 478pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1991; latest in the "Dragonriders of Pern" series.) 17th September 1992.

Mace, David. *Chasing the Sun*. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-55989-0, 372pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Technothriller, first edition; an up-to-date aviation tale by a British author who has also written sf proper, e.g. *Frankenstein's Children*.) 20th August 1992.

Martin, Michael. *A Year Near Proxima Centauri*. Illustrated by Lucy Martin. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-99527-4, 135pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF spoof, first edition; proof copy received; "an imaginative month by month diary of a year spent on the planet Proxima." It's a take-off on the bestselling *A Year in Provence* by Peter Mayle.) November 1992.

May, Julian. *Blood Trillium*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224055-6, 336pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; sequel to *Block Trillium* by Marion Bradley, Julian May and Andre Norton; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 64.) 3rd August 1992.

Moorcock, Michael. *The Revenge of the Rose: A Tale of the Albino Prince in the Years of His Wandering*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21200-9, 233pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991.) 20th August 1992.

Paxson, Diana L. *The Jewel of Fire*. "Book Six of the Chronicles of Westria." Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56227-1, 309pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992, where it was subtitled "The Seventh Book of Westria"; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 63; it still says "Copyright 1986" inside, as it did in the American edition from Tor, but we think this is an error.) 6th August 1992.

Pratchett, Terry. *Only You Can Save Mankind*. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-403689, 172pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; Pratchett's first new children's book since the bestselling "Truckers" trilogy; the same publishers recently reissued his debut novel *The Carpet People* [1971] in a revised edition, but we weren't sent a review copy.) 17th September 1992.

Rankin, Robert. *The Brentford Triangle*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13842-8, 237pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1982; sequel to *The Antipope* and second in the "Brentford Trilogy.") 13th August 1992.

Rice, Anne. *The Tale of the Body Thief*. Chaffin & Windus, no ISBN shown, 428pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992; proof copy received; fourth in the "Vampire Chronicles" series.) 5th October 1992.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. *The White Mists of Power*. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85796-000-X, 265pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; proof copy received.) 17th September 1992.

Saul, John. *Sleep Walk*. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40341-9, 452pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 13th August 1992.

Saul, John. *The Unloved*. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17564-5, 356pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 13th August 1992.

Shaw, Bob. *Terminal Velocity*. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05314-3, xvii+160pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published as *Vertigo*, 1978; this edition also contains the 1975 short story "Dark leucus" as a prologue.) 6th August 1992.

Stephenson-Payne, Phil. Charles L. Harness: *Attorney in Space — A Working Bibliography*. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 44." Galactic Central Publications [25A Coppogue Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-34-3, 9+15pp, paperbound, £1.50. (SF author bibliography; first edition; earlier volumes in this useful small-press series of well-researched bibliographies have covered such authors as Brian Aldiss, Paul Anderson, Philip K. Dick, Philip José Farmer, Harry Harrison, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Fritz Leiber, Anne McCaffrey, Eric Frank Russell, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Vance and John Wyndham.) June 1992.

Stone, Rodney. *Cries in the Night*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21534-4, 304pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in 1991; the author is British, and has previously written a book called *The Dark Side of the Hill*.) 20th August 1992.

Tepper, Sheri S. *Raising the Stones*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21212-4, 620pp, paperback, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 54.) 9th July 1992.

Tine, Robert. *Universal Soldier*. "Based on a screenplay written by Richard Rothstein & Christopher Leitch and Dean Devlin." Penguin/Signet, ISBN 0-45-117542-5, 236pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1992.) 30th July 1992.

Volksy, Paula. *Interzone*. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05596-1, 700pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 60.) 20th August 1992.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. *Serpent Mage: The Death Gate Cycle, Volume 4*. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02386-2, 407pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 16th July 1992.

Whitbourne, John. *A Dangerous Energy*. "Winner of the BBC Bookshelf/Gollancz first fantasy novel competition." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05355-0, 317pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Alternative-world fantasy novel, first edition.) 13th August 1992.

Zahn, Timothy. *Dark Force Rising: Star Wars, Volume 2*. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02515-6, 376pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; the second in a new cycle of "original" Star Wars adventures, based on the characters created by George Lucas.) 13th August 1992.

Overseas Books Received

Aldiss, Margaret. **The Work of Brian W. Aldiss: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide.** Bibliographies of Modern Authors, Number Nine. Borgo Press, ISBN 0-89370-488-1, 360pp, trade paperback, \$29. (Author bibliography, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at \$39 [not seen]; an excellent, fat and detailed bibliography, it replaces Margaret Aldiss's earlier chapbooks about her husband's work, *Item Forty-Three* [1962] and *Item Eighty-Three* [1972].) Late entry: May 1992 publication, received in July.

Benford, Gregory, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **What Might Have Been? Volume 4: Alternate Americas.** Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29007-X, 305pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Alternative-world sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains new stories, mostly on the "Christopher Columbus" theme, by A.A. Attanasio, L. Sprague de Camp, Barry Malzberg, James Morrow, Kim Stanley Robinson, Pamela Sargent, Robert Silverberg, Harry Turtledove and others.) October 1992.

Brosnan, John. **The War of the Sky Lords.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-07882-X, 252pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1989; second in the "Sky Lords" trilogy; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 35.) 15th July 1992.

Cadnum, Michael. **Ghostwright.** Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-801-8, 307pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror [?] novel, first edition; Cadnum is the author of the werewolf novel *Saint Peter's Wolf*, which has received quite a lot of praise; the publishers don't actually label this new book as horror, but it does have a black dustjacket and the word "ghost" in the title.) July 1992?

Cantrell, Lisa W. **Boneman.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85307-6, 257pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1992.

Donaldson, Stephen R. **The Gap Into Power: A Dark and Hungry God Arises.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-07176-9, 474pp, hardcover, \$21.50. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; third in the "Gap" series, to be followed by *The Gap Into Madness: Chaos and Order*.) 15th October 1992.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Year's Best Science Fiction, Ninth Annual Collection.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-07891-9, 575pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; we listed the hardcover proof a couple of months ago, and this trade pb is apparently simultaneous with it; among many other 1991 stories, this fine and hefty anthology contains three selections from the pages of *Interzone*: "Blood Sisters" by

Greg Egan, "Gene Wars" by Paul J. McAuley and "La Macchina" by Chris Beckett.) 30th July 1992.

Friesner, Esther. **Yesterday We Saw Mermaids.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85352-1, 157pp, hardcover, \$16.95. (Fantasy novella, first edition; proof copy received; it concerns Columbus, and is timed to coincide with the 500th anniversary of his first voyage to America.) October 1992.

Gunn, James. **The Unpublished Gunn, Part One.** "Drumm Booklet #40." Chris Drumm [PO Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226, USA], ISBN 0-936055-52-9, 44pp, paperbound, \$4. (Sf collection, first edition; contains four previously unpublished stories and an author's introduction; to be followed by another slim volume containing a further five stories.) July 1992?

Hartwell, David G., ed. **Foundations of Fear: An Exploration of Horror.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85074-3, 660pp, hardcover, \$27.50. (Horror-fiction anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it's a companion volume to the same editor's earlier massive book *The Dark Descent*, and contains a similarly interesting introduction; here, he has chosen to reprint tales by Gertrude Atherton, Clive Barker, Thomas M. Disch, Daphne du Maurier, Thomas Hardy, E.T.A. Hoffmann, H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Machen, Richard Matheson, Peter Straub and many others.) September 1992.

Kuttner, Henry. **Waters of Death.** Introduction by Will Murray. Tattered Pages Press/Pulp Vault [6942 N. Oleander, Chicago, IL 60631, USA], no ISBN shown, 36pp, paperbound, \$5 [\$6 inc. postage overseas]. (Sf/adventure novella, first edition; originally published under the pseudonym of "Charles Stoddard" in *Thrilling Adventures* magazine, September 1941; about a hero called Thunder Jim Wade and his adventures in a lost land of dinosaurs, it's a grand old "Doc Savage"/Raiders of the Lost Ark-type pulp yarn, photographed from the pages of the magazine, with illustrations.) July 1992.

Martin, George R.R., with Melinda M. Snodgrass, eds. **Dealer's Choice: A Wild Cards Mosaic Novel.** Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29161-0, 426pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Shared-world sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; 11th volume in the series, containing new stories by Ed Bryant, Stephen Leigh, Walter Jon Williams and others.) November 1992.

Salmonson, Jessica Amanda. **Sorceries and Sorrows (Early Poems).** "Drumm Booklet #42." Chris Drumm [PO Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226, USA], ISBN 0-936055-54-5, unpaginated [about 40pp], paperbound, \$3.75. (Poetry collection by an sf/fantasy author, first edition; it's bound back-to-back

with *Bibliography* by Jessica Amanda Salmonson, the author's own listing of all her own published works, most of which have appeared in the small press.) July 1992?

Somtow, S.P. **Valentine.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85145-6, 373pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1992; proof copy received; sequel to *Vampire Junction*; it seems that the Gollancz edition of April 1992 was the world first edition after all.) October 1992.

Wells, Angus. **Dark Magic: The Godwars Book II.** Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29129-7, 519pp, paperback, \$5.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK [?], 1992; proof copy received.) November 1992.

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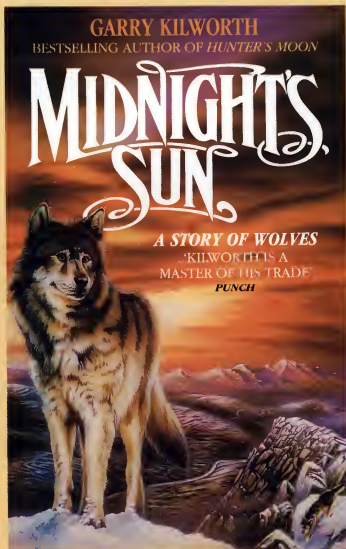
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